













*THE GENTLE  
COLOSSUS*



# *THE GENTLE COLOSSUS*

*a study of Jawaharlal Nehru*

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## P R E F A C E

A few years ago I had some words of encouragement from Jawaharlal Nehru when I told him of an idea I had formed about a study of Gandhiji. "Has anybody in India written a biography yet?", he said at that time, biography which was neither adulation nor attack.

This book does not claim to be a biography of Jawaharlal Nehru. Perhaps it may be considered an essay towards a biography which one day must be written.

I have had the good fortune of being admitted to the affections of Jawaharlal Nehru. It is something that I hesitate to speak about. When he was alive we would often write to each other, but it was entirely personal and almost always it was far removed from the stink of day-to-day politics. If from a railway carriage window the Supreme Court building hurt my eyes till the sight of Humayun's tomb soothed them, I would tell him about it but not whisper a word to others who would not understand. In this book I have referred, with some reluctance, to a very few of his letters and printed one fully in facsimile. This is not out of personal vanity but a desire to let the reader have some inkling of a certain relationship with him which must colour my writing.

His death was a shock for which I had been trying to prepare myself for some time, as one does for the loss, when it seems inevitable, of very dear ones. Even so, when it came, hurt terribly. Perhaps I could write a book about him in those shadowed days of mourning. But it is better that I have written later, though it may be that I should have waited longer. "*Souffrir passe ; avoir souffert ne passe jamais.*"

I could not, even if I had wanted to, write a purely personal essay. But perhaps the personal factor creeps also into my most impersonal chapters. If I was a good enough Marxist, which I fear I am not, I would have written differently. I have written as the bent took me, for I could not do otherwise.

What I owe to other published work is indicated, somewhat roughly and by no means exhaustively, in the text; the literature of what may be called Nehruana is fairly vast already.



A few good friends have helped me, often without being aware of it, in the writing of this book. Among them are Sadath Ali Khan, our ambassador in Iraq, Bishnu Dey, the poet and scholar, and M. Chalapathi Rau, editor of "National Herald". I should make particular mention also of the "Economic Weekly" (Special Issue, July 1960) which contains some valuable writing on Jawaharlal Nehru.

Somewhat like my earlier study of Gandhiji but in different ways and more acutely this has been a difficult book to write. More extrinsic factors have added to the difficulty. Most of the writing had to be done rapidly between other trying work, in different places and without careful co-ordination between earlier and later chapters. There might thus be some repetitiveness which should have been avoided. It is with some trepidation, indeed, that I let this book off my hands and hope that it will receive the indulgence of its readers.

I should add that I have been helped by my wife and our two children wanting me to write; they had known something of Jawaharlal's charm from close quarters and were keen that I wrote this book. Dilip Bose, deciding to make this the first of Manisha's publications, had shown the most friendly interest in it, even to the extent of subjecting himself to the boredom involved in preparing an index. Without Tarun Sen Gupta's zeal and the co-operation of Sri Gauranga Press, the printing also could not have proceeded smoothly.

October 8, 1960

HIREN MUKERJEE.

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## CHAPTER I

### IN THE HEART OF INDIA

"Have you heard, Ananda", once the Buddha, it is recorded, asked his first disciple, "that the Vajjians had full and frequent public assemblies?" When Ananda replied: "Lord, so I have heard", the Blessed One rejoined: "So long as the Vajjians hold these full and frequent public assemblies, so long may they be expected not to decline but to prosper."

It was with a certain appropriateness, if purely coincidental, that Parliament had been called for a short and urgent session, to meet (May 27, 1964) in Delhi the day after *Buddha Jayanti*, a public holiday for India in commemoration of the birth, the Enlightenment and the death of Gautam Buddha. And to be present in Lok Sabha, of which he was the Leader, Jawaharlal Nehru had returned on May 26 from Dehra Dun, apparently refreshed by the few days' rest he had there and ready to resume the threads of work over which, since mid-January when he was taken suddenly ill, his grip, always so assured and superbly competent, had inevitably somewhat loosened.

Quite characteristically, he had refused to truckle down, as it were, to the unfamiliar ailment which was, nevertheless, inexorably sapping his vitality. Not that he refused the regimen that his doctors wanted him to observe, but taking risks, it seems, was a mood he could not shed. How it happened, in spite of Indira, his devoted daughter, being with him, is still a mystery, but at Dehra Dun, to save time over a short journey, he rode in a helicopter, though there was no overriding reason for it, causing an already stricken heart jolts and jars that should certainly have been avoided. One cannot be sure of the causal connection between this escapade and what followed less than a day later, but it is



painful to think that the helicopter journey had been permitted to take place.

Hardly had the full moon night (*Buddha Poornima*) of May 26 ended when Jawaharlal had sharp notice that something was wrong with the machine that was his body ; his back ached, and he needed a little massage. He was not the sort of person to lose faith in an old friend, his own body, that had served him well for so long. Only a few days earlier he had met the press and in answer to a question about his health, had said with a smile that his life was not to ebb away so soon. This made everyone happy, for ever since January, when he was suddenly unwell at the Bhuvaneshwar meeting of the Congress party, there was grave anxiety in the minds of our people. This happiness, however, was not to last, for in the morning of May 27 he was stricken down again, and after some hours of unconsciousness his heart ceased to beat.

The night before his death, he had worked as usual, disposed of files and dictated letters which were to await his signature the next morning. Between the dark and the daylight, when the night had lowered and the new dawn sent its first gleam, he may have had some premonition of death, but it did not prevent him doing his usual early morning chores—he washed and shaved and got ready for the day, even as he must have felt worn out and in pain. It was not in his nature to be sluggish and untidy, whether in his person or his manner or his thought, and if death was to walk in, well, he would be ready to receive his guest properly and not be caught napping.

In the death of his master, Gandhi, who died at the hand of an assassin, "in the fullness of his powers and at the moment of prayer", Jawaharlal had noted "a magnificence and complete artistry". "He (Gandhi) died suddenly, as all men should wish to die. There was no fading away of the body or a long illness or the forgetfulness of the mind which comes with age".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Article in Harijan, Feb. 2, 1948.

Perhaps, with his own perfect health which was an invaluable asset in an unceasingly active life, he was unconsciously expressing his fear of the "fading away of the body", a fear which, happily, did not materialize. Since January, he was taking things easy; it was a trial for him to keep from doing all that he wanted to, but he was being careful and was nursing his strength. There was no fading, however, of his spirit, and though in recent months he had visibly aged, he was in the plenitude of his powers. In fact, he seemed on the point of adopting new initiatives, in respect of our relations with Pakistan and the question of Kashmir, and also perhaps re-orientation of the Plans. And he had for so long guided the country and made himself in the eyes of the people not only a supremely lovable but also a thoroughly indispensable figure that it was strange and perplexing and distressful to find his place empty. When he died, it was not only the end of a great life and of a proud epoch of India's history, but also a shock to all our people, of a sort that could be caused only by the passing away of one who was no mere political figure but verily a part of our life.

When the Buddha died, the venerable Maha Kashyapa exhorted the disconsolate mourners: "Enough, my brethren! Weep not, neither lament. Has not the Exalted One declared this, that anything whatever born, brought into being, contains within itself the inherent need for dissolution, how then is it possible that such a being should not be dissolved? No such condition can endure".<sup>2</sup> In his lifetime, Jawaharlal had often told his countrymen that they should not worry overmuch about his not being there—he would gently chide those who noised abroad the once-hackneyed question. "After Nehru, who and what?" Deeply emotional himself, he disliked sentimentality and the spiritual sloth which was its concomitant. Even as he lay, still and serene in death, and as hundreds of thousands of his stricken

<sup>2</sup> Anil Vigier-DeSilva, "The Life of the Buddha" (Phaidon Press, London, 1956), Pp. 47-48.



countrymen passed by his bier to pay him homage, they could feel, as it were, his spirit which outsoared the shadow of their grief. Yet there was something stunning, and infinitely pitiful, in the sight of his noble face in endless repose and the silence it bespoke, like the falling snow and *the hour before the dawn when all is still.*

'Death, the necessary end, will come when it will come'. But the void that descended on India with Jawaharlal's passing away seemed one that could never be filled. No doubt, with time the edge of sorrow was to be dulled, but the bleakness and desolation that fell that day as a pall on India and threw a shadow on the sun which even on a May afternoon seemed as if it never shone, was evidence of something that was precious dying in all our hearts. And India's millions mourned as they had never mourned before, while from the four quarters of the globe came messages of sympathy and a sense of universal loss. It was very moving, especially when one recalls that Jawaharlal Nehru was leaving crucial tasks and difficult problems for his country unsolved, and as the world reckons success his last years did not have much to show in that line. An odd Indian, journeying in the United States, made comments that were fatuous and in bad taste, but that was on account of a fixation he had, and a perverse desire to draw public attention to himself. A few voices were heard, in West Germany for instance, which jarred—as did the deliberate silence that emanated from China. One or two, like Salvador de Madariaga, seemed, unable to resist a habit, that some people develop, of patronizing the memory of one who was greater than they could know.<sup>2</sup> On the whole, and very naturally, the sorrow was sincere and universally shared. In India, left-wing communists who had even jibbed at simple birthday felicitations from any of their number to Nehru appeared as affected with grief as all others were, and the right-wing reactionaries

who missed no opportunity of pillorying Jawaharlal and his policies said that they could "only remember all that was good and great" in the man who was no more.

Shortly before his death, Jawaharlal kept on his desk a pad on which he had copied out, in his own hand, the following lines written by the American poet, Robert Frost:

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep  
And miles to go before I sleep.

Perhaps, with his health impaired and ceaseless toil taking inevitable toll of his body, he would recall his own words of sensitive beauty when at the midnight hour of August 14-15, 1947, old India woke to life and freedom. "Long years ago", he said then, "we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially." That pledge was "a pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity". It was to fulfil a great ambition, the ambition of Gandhi, "to wipe every tear from every eye". It was not a lone man's pledge, but the pledge of a people, personified as it were in the man who is gone. It was a pledge that was in no one man's power fully to redeem, but his people loved him for he did what he had said he would—"burn myself up working for India"—not indeed in bravado but in love and affection, which he gave his people and got back from them in overwhelming measure.

In his will he had expressed a desire to have "a handful of my ashes" after cremation thrown into the Ganga, "the river of India", at Allahabad where he had lived much of his life. This, he stressed, had "no religious significance, so far as I am concerned". And "the major portion of the ashes" he wanted scattered from the air "over the fields where the peasants of India toil, so that they might mingle with the dust and soil of India and become an indistinguishable part of her". In something like the delirium of grief,



the scattering of the ashes took place with pomp and ceremony which had near-revivalist overtones he had warned against. However, it was a lapse which could be related to a kind of temporary mental atrophy which overtook many as he died. It was, in its own way, evidence of the abounding affection of our people for the peerless one who had passed away.

"All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full". One can endlessly contemplate the many fascinating aspects of his character and his work, for he was always growing, responding to needs, making mistakes, failing, fumbling, unable to make history as he wanted it but aching and fighting civilly for the right sense of perspective and of direction. There never was a more human man—fallible, prone at one time to gusts of passion, albeit with a great capacity of recovering himself, so sensitive that the world's sorrow was his own, always lonely and yet more beloved by masses of the people, his own as well as foreign, than any other man in politics has perhaps ever been. In his last years, especially, he had developed a certain quietude, serene but also somewhat pathetic, for the charm and verve of his moods, which became him so, seemed clouded over by what was perhaps the death of some of his hopes.

The time is not yet when dispassionate judgment can be pronounced with any finality on the many-faceted life and work of Jawaharlal Nehru, or a proper evaluation made not only of his personality but also of his place in the history of his times. This is not only because in India we need to collect ourselves better, and to proceed to keep the promises which were not alone for Jawaharlal Nehru to keep, and in the process discover many essential things. This is also because our times are uncommonly complicated, its perspectives generous at one point and cribbed at another, with its ~~in~~measurable potentialities and sometimes nearly bizarre perplexities, with progress and peril so often intermingled—in sum, so simple and complex at the same time that against its background, judgment on a man so dowered with often

contradictory virtues and overflowing, if not entirely organized, humanity should await a more propitious opportunity and some more efflux of time. Meanwhile, India feels the heavy change, now that Jawaharlal is gone and gone for ever. Perhaps, it is not yet a time of speaking, but a time of being still. However, life presses and calls for a continuous effort to learn from whatever study can be made of the incomparable man whose memory, like his ashes, repose in the heart of India.



## CHAPTER II

### THE YEARS OF SHELTERED UNEASE

One of the minor mysteries of recent Indian history awaits unravelling: how was it that a very lonely man who was, till he was thirty or more, a misfit in Indian life and averse to politics, who often had in his country "an exile's feeling"—"out of place everywhere, at home nowhere"—grew to be the most shining symbol of his country, nearer and dearer to his people than even Gandhiji was? This quest will involve a search for the springs of his character, and if properly made, will be more than worth while.

In late-March 1922, while standing his second political trial when he was sentenced to twenty-one months' imprisonment, he did not, like other non-co-operators of the time, offer any defence, but gave a statement which *inter alia* recalled:

"Less than ten years ago, I returned from England after a long stay there . . . I had imbibed most of the prejudices of Harrow and Cambridge, and in my likes and dislikes I was perhaps more an Englishman than an Indian. I looked upon the world almost from an Englishman's standpoint . . . as much prejudiced in favour of England and the English as it was possible for an Indian to be."<sup>1</sup>

Years later, he wrote: "India was in my blood and there was much in her that instinctively thrilled me. And yet I approached her almost as an alien critic, full of dislike for the present as well as for many of the relics of the past that I saw. To some extent I came to her *via* the West, and looked at her as a friendly Westerner might have done. I was eager and anxious to change her outlook and appearance, and give her the garb of modernity. And yet doubts

arose within me. Did I know India?—I who presumed to scrap much of her past heritage? There was a great deal that had to be scrapped, that must be scrapped; but surely India could not have been what she undoubtedly was, and could not have continued a cultured existence for thousands of years, if she had not possessed something very vital and enduring, something that was worth while.”<sup>2</sup>

Jawaharlal's 'discovery' of India took place by a very natural process, and as things happened to him and his times he returned from something like no man's land to India's lap. This was a tribute, by the way, to our country's aeonic vitality, a vitality which Jawaharlal with his sensitive responses found also a burden, "a burden of both good and ill, overpowering, sometimes suffocating," and he quoted Nietzsche: "Not only the wisdom of centuries—also their madness breaketh out in us. Dangerous is it to be an heir." He was helped in his discovery of his country and of his own place in it by the tempest that raged in his time, at home and abroad, a tempest which required him to find a way. He was helped, no doubt, by Gandhi, by his father Motilal, in a different way even by Rabindranath Tagore, but the achievement was Jawaharlal's own. Perhaps when one remembers the first three decades of Jawaharlal's career one might exclaim, in the context of modern life, "What does he know of India who only India knows?"

It is something of a paradox that the man who is now, with Gandhi, above party, above disputation, part of the heritage of India, showed, when he was young, hardly any promise of the future trend of his life. Born to affluence and brought up in luxury, he might very well have gone the way of his kind, earning money, making "good" in society, perhaps also in the sort of public life that was then envisaged, and it would have been no surprise. Indeed, there were signs at one time, after his return from England when he was about twenty-three, that he would settle down,



if somewhat desultorily, to practise at the Bar and perhaps after he had gone through the grind inherit the mantle of his father who was the leader of the profession in Allahabad. He had, no doubt, some serious qualms about the sort of life he was expected to lead; it was, he feared, a fundamentally pointless existence if one slid down the alleys of gentility into the grooves of prosperous banality. But such qualms usually fade away when the prizes of success seem easy of access, as it must have done to Jawaharlal. Happily, his qualms remained and then things began to happen in India which made even his proud father, Motilal, so much more settled in his habits and his ways of thought, feel a sea-change surge over his life.<sup>3</sup> This was the saving of Jawaharlal, and an auspicious turn to our history.

Jawaharlal had a lonely childhood—his sister Vijaya Lakshmi (who was later to be famous in her own right) was born in 1900, when he was eleven—and there was little opportunity for him to play with children of his own age. After six months at a convent school he was, a mere seven-year-old, brought back home to be coached by private tutors. His mother, dear soul, would have pampered him, but his father, while inordinately fond of the son and heir, had great expectations of the child and in his domineering way decided that he should have what was then thought to be the very best kind of education at home, uncontaminated by the ways of the rabble outside. He was lucky in his tutor, an Irishman named Brooks, who helped him to imbibe a love for literature and for science, as well as, more dubiously, an interest in theosophy about which, when thirteen years of age, Jawaharlal got into youthful raptures. "A dear old pundit" who was to instruct him in Sanskrit and Hindi "managed to teach me extraordinarily little", which nobody worried about, since in any case he was to go to school abroad. At fifteen, he went to Harrow, where in his time

<sup>3</sup> Nanda, *op. cit.* This is a very well-written book on the two Nehrus, which sometimes suffers for a failure to stress that Motilal was a great deal more than the father of his son.

there were only four or five Indian boys, belonging mostly to the princely order. Even at that age, he must have had very good nerves, for he did not entirely feel a misfit as some of the Indians did, and while he was not a terribly good mixer, was reasonably well liked and had a fair record, both at work and in play.

Motilal had ideas of his own about his son but he must have taken good care to see that he did not grow to be a problem child, even though he was almost necessarily rather lonely. He was a good liver, and with parties constantly taking place and every appurtenance of luxury available, there was a joyous atmosphere about the house, and little Jawaharlal, even when excluded from adult assemblages or brought in as an exhibit for one fond moment, imbibed something of the atmosphere. Motilal was a disciplinarian and had an explosive temper, of which the little son at least once had an experience he could not forget. But he admired his father tremendously as his childhood's *beau ideal*, and even though fear formed part of it, his admiration and affection was of the deepest quality. With his gentle mother he was more confiding, and thanks to her practice of social and religious rites he learnt to be no stranger to "the beauty of holiness" that there is in religion and its lore. With old family retainers like Munshi Mubarak Ali. and with humbler servants, he would, often as a child, find refuge, and hear stories, old and new, that retain and refurbish the memory of the race. Jawaharlal, in short, was a healthy, if sometimes rather moody child, except, as he says, in his theosophical period when as a grave thirteen-year-old he developed "the flat and insipid look which sometimes denotes piety and which is (or was) often to be seen among theosophist men and women."<sup>4</sup>

There is no need to linger over the Harrow and Cambridge phase of his life, which, especially the latter, were pleasant years happily and usefully spent in imbibing fresh

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 16.



and keener tastes in literature and in science, in forming friendships and the habit of uninhibited discussion of everything under the sun or even beyond it, and in being able to indulge in youth's prerogative of dreaming dreams and seeing visions. He developed, for both places, perhaps for Cambridge more than for Harrow, a sort of emotional attachment which comes easy at that age and lazily lingers, but he never made too much of a song about it. He took a certain interest in British politics, was mildly drawn towards the Sinn Fein movement in Ireland and the Fabian exposition of socialism, and felt a certain excitement over such things as the advance in aviation. He did not particularly impress his contemporaries at the University, for he seemed the typical public school man, pleasant, polished, and snobbish without meaning to be so. But for the accident of his being under age and the desire of his parents to have him near them, he might have drifted into the Indian Civil Service, instead of which he joined the Inns of Court with no particular taste for law and was called to the Bar. In London, while reading for the Bar, he lived in some luxury, keener on the pleasures of society than on other things, though he had sense enough (and even more, sensibility) not to sow any wild oats. Soon after being called to the Bar in 1912, he returned to India—"a bit of a prig with little to commend me", as he put it retrospectively, and with some exaggeration, in his autobiography.

While abroad, the young Nehru was, in relation to Indian politics, a nationalist inclined towards the then extreme wing of the movement represented by Bal Gangadhar Tilak. This is seen over and over again in his correspondence with his father—a notable fact, for Motilal who did not hide his light under a bushel would obviously have liked his beloved progeny to second his 'moderate' views.<sup>5</sup>

Jawaharlal would usually write on politics to his father gently, with some deference, interspersing criticism with

<sup>5</sup> One valuable feature of B. R. Nanda's book *op. cit.* is that it sets forth, *passim*, some very interesting correspondence between father and son.

expressions of the admiration he deeply felt for his parent, and occasionally, with a mild irony. Only once, it appears, he broke his bounds, for he blurted out (January 1908) in sudden malignancy: "I wonder if the insulting offer of a *Rai Bahadurship* or something equivalent, would make you less of a moderate than you are."<sup>6</sup> The father was stung into fury, and for a couple of months or so seethed with it, till the son apologised and they made it up. It was not a fair remark, on any computation, and Jawaharlal must have known it almost at once. Jawaharlal's interest in politics, Indian and other, was still no more than tepid, and yet the fact remains that when a little over seventeen, things happening in India could rouse him to deal a venomous fling to his dearly beloved father. It seems to be evidence of still waters running deep in Jawaharlal's mind, of a proud and perfervid patriotism forming even as he was trying to live the life of an English gentleman at large.

When Jawaharlal first went to Cambridge, his father had sent him one typical piece of advice. Convinced that Indians generally suffered from a chronic depravity while the British had the kind of excellence which the former simply needed to emulate, he told his son: "Do not go near the *Majlis* or the *Native* club or whatever it is called!" The warning was disregarded: the 'Native Club' was found to be a very intimate little place where one could eat a special kind of oysters ("natives"), and the *Majlis*, where Indians congregated, Jawaharlal discovered to be by no means "reprehensible", but only somewhat infested by "parlour firebrands", of whom quite a number turned out later to be staid and sober and successful people who kept well away from Indian political movements.<sup>7</sup> However, the younger Nehru could never bring himself to speak in that voluble place of meeting, not only because he was naturally shy but also, it is clear, because he was repelled by what seemed to him a rather vulgar preoccupation, namely, politics. Among Indian celeb-

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 92.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 89; Nehru, "An Autobiography", P. 22.



rities who visited Cambridge in his time were Bepin Chandra Pal, Lajpat Rai and Gokhale. He was not entirely unimpressed by the two last-named, but Pal fairly disgusted him, not because of whatever he did say but because he spoke too "loud", causing in a small room such noise that he could "hardly follow" what was being said.

It is to be noted that the extreme subjective reaction of patriotic passion towards foreign rule, which is the practice of terrorism and which in the first decade of the twentieth century was quite a phenomenon in India, never roused Jawaharlal's imagination. When Madanlal Dhingra shot at Sir William Curzon-Wylie and killed him in a crowded London meeting (1909), Jawaharlal hardly reacted to the event, though Dhingra's cool courage and patriotic fervour elicited admiration even in Britain. With his father, he believed that "socially speaking, the revival of Indian nationalism in 1907 was definitely reactionary",<sup>8</sup> a statement by no means inaccurate, but oblivious of the objective context in which a fettered and frustrated nationalism had to fight its way out into the open. As a matter of fact, the son's admiration of the father's forthright presidential speech before the Social Conference (1909), when "the two ugliest blots on our social system—caste and purdah" were roundly condemned was a great deal more whole-hearted than his somewhat superior and cynical digs from time to time at Motilal's "immoderate moderation". If one comes to think about it, it was not "curious", though Jawaharlal noted in his autobiography it was, "that in spite of my growing extremism in politics, I did not view with any strong disfavour the idea of joining the I.C.S." It is of some little interest also that though Motilal could be facetious about "the command of His Gracious Majesty King-Emperor George V to be in attendance at Delhi (for the *Durbar* of December 1911), a funny way of inviting a gentleman", Jawaharlal who was asked to arrange the despatch from London of the requisite

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<sup>8</sup> Nehru, *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Court dress and other accessories did so and wrote about it, without apparently anything like a return pleasantry! Only a little later, however, he was disturbed by a report of his father getting a knighthood—"not worth very much now-a-days in England; even a peerage is now hardly a thing to shout about"—and was reassured by Motilal telling him that he did not care for a title.<sup>9</sup>

Jawaharlal's father had wanted him, while abroad, to live a life of sheltered ease but to prepare himself seriously for a career, the law preferably, and get to the top and gladden the old man's heart. That there could be other prospects and perspectives was, of course, unknown and unguessed at the time. But Jawaharlal, in spite of such occasional lapses as yielding to the lures of dandyism and overspending his generous allowance, had a quality of character which often shone out. He would not, he averred, "go through life as a mere lawyer"—a remark which cut his father to the quick—and if he had to send in detailed accounts of his expenditure he would rather pack up and go home. He would speak with easy grace about books, about the possibilities of air travel, about his adventure (which he said he "would not have missed for a lot") when he nearly drifted away in a Norwegian mountain torrent. And he would not fail to notice that even in Cambridge, at a ceremonial function the Vice-Chancellor, conferring honorary degrees on a number of distinguished people did not deign to get up from his chair when the two Indian recipients, the Aga Khan and the Maharaja of Bikaner, appeared before him although he had stood up for everyone else.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps he harboured in himself a still generally "inarticulate stubbornness, a secret furious inviolacy, a gathering of impressions for eventual use within some as yet dormant new configuration of thought."<sup>11</sup>



Jawaharlal returned to India in 1912 and soon after the first raptures of the welcome back into the bosom of the family had passed, found himself in his characteristically ambivalent mood. With a certain basic *joie de vivre*, he responded to the loving tenderness with which he was received and also to the apparently soothing luxury and security of his life at home. He joined the Bar, where as his father's son he was expected soon to shoot up, and he was introduced to the indifferent and unexciting pathways of politics which were open at that time to one of his kind in India. In early 1916 he was married,<sup>12</sup> and their daughter Indira was born in November next year. But all the time he was restless, and the routine life irked him. In the summer of 1916 he left his wife and mother for a hazardous trek with a cousin beyond Zozi-la pass up above the Kashmir valley and as in Norway some years earlier, narrowly escaped drowning in a mountain torrent. At the Bar, he would do his work conscientiously, but his manner, while correct, was cool, and he felt a kind of listlessness about the whole proceeding. More and more, he felt it "pointless and futile", about as much as was the politics of his time which he sampled in 1912 at the Bankipore (Patna) session of the Indian National Congress—"very much an English-knowing upper class affair where morning coats and well-pressed trousers were greatly in evidence."<sup>13</sup> He did not seem to have taken the trouble, which would not have been worth while in any case, of attending the next three sessions of the Congress, and even the meeting at Lucknow (1916) which was important from many points of view found him a not particularly enthusiastic spectator. Aching for something tangible to do, he had toyed for a while with the idea of joining the Servants of India Society in spite of the Society's excruciating moderation in politics, but he had no intention then of leaving the legal profession which would have been required. He found

<sup>12</sup> In the second chapter of "The Discovery of India", Nehru has left a moving reference to his wife who died in 1936.

<sup>13</sup> "Autobiography", P. 27.

some satisfaction in joining the two Home Rule Leagues (1916-17), one started by Tilak and the other by Mrs. Annie Besant, for both of whom he had considerable admiration, but it proved a short-lived experience. He interested himself in whatever little work he could to help Indians in South Africa and to agitate against the system of indentured Indian labour in Fiji. On the whole, however, his life moved in placid grooves and these little peripheral activities left him unsatisfied. Even at that time he was, as he wrote later, "an abnormal person with mystery and unplumbed depths within me, which I could not myself fathom."<sup>14</sup> Towards his self-discovery, in the course of action where he could lose himself, steps would now begin to be taken, for India, as World War I drew to its end, seethed as she had never seethed before, and a man appeared, Gandhi, a "little man of poor physique (with) something of steel in him", a man who, in his serenity and unsuspected strength, was the embodiment of our ancient land.

<sup>14</sup> "The Discovery of India", P. 30.



### CHAPTER III

#### THE SPELL OF GANDHI

In his autobiography, Jawaharlal Nehru relates with relish an interesting anecdote. A good friend of his father's, Sir Rash Behary Ghosh, who was one of India's most eminent lawyers and an ex-president of the Congress, once felt badgered by a guest at dinner who was talking about saints and blurted out: "A saint! I hate saints, I want to have nothing to do with them." His father, Motilal, shared a similar allergy, and once contributing a foreword to a booklet of selected Gandhi writings, significantly remarked: "I have heard of saints and supermen, but have never had the pleasure of meeting them, and must confess to a feeling of scepticism about their real existence. I believe in men and things manly". And he ended by quoting the lines of Swinburne:

Have we not men with us royal,  
Men the masters of things?<sup>1</sup>

Elsewhere, in the same book, Jawaharlal refers to the close and cordial link between his father and Gandhi: "a strange combination—the saint, the stoic, the man of religion, one who went through life rejecting what it offers in the way of sensation and physical pleasure, and one who had been a bit of an epicure, who accepted life and welcomed and enjoyed its many sensations, and cared little for what may come in the hereafter".<sup>2</sup> Jawaharlal stood, as it were, between the two, introvert and extrovert at the same time, drawn deeply towards either, offering them all that he could of affection and a fundamental allegiance which soared over occasional and sorely felt differences. He first saw Bapu, as Gandhi was called by his disciples, in 1916, and it was not

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<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 35-36, 129.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 65.

long before he became his captive. Till 1919, perhaps, he found Gandhi more of a puzzle than he knew how to deal with, but for all his fads and vagaries, a man of peculiar charm and of hidden reserves of power. It was then, that, with World War I ended and India's bottled-up discontent (added to anger at Britain's puny offer of the niggardly Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms) beginning to flare up, Gandhi was emerging as the leader after our people's heart. It was the glimmering of the politics of action which rejoiced Jawaharlal and rescued him from inevitable cynicism, something very different from the usual, if rather deferential, noise of ineffective resolutions of protest or condemnation which nobody took very seriously. The voice that one heard was "quiet and low, and yet it could be heard above the shouting of the multitude ; it was soft and gentle, and yet there seemed to be steel hidden away somewhere in it—behind the language of peace and friendship there was power and the quivering shadow of action and determination not to submit to a wrong." In February and March 1919 it was a voice new to India ; "we did not quite know what to make of it, but we were thrilled."<sup>3</sup>

The post-war year found our people eager for action—they wanted to fight rising prices, there was a wave of industrial strikes (in Bombay alone, 1,25,000 textile workers were involved) and resentment at Britain's broken promises of self-government as the reward of assistance to the war effort was at fever height. To this phenomenon Gandhi alone responded with the characteristic offer of *Satyagraha*, a scheme "to refuse civilly to obey" the infamous Rowlatt Act (which had made even mere intention to publish 'sedition' punishable by imprisonment) and such other laws as the *Satyagraha Sabha* may decide upon. With all its defects and the somewhat intangible spiritual overtones that Gandhi stressed, this was at least some kind of direct defiance of authority on a mass scale, and made Jawaharlal in Allahabad, sick of the futilities

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130 ; cf. also "Freedom from Fear" by Jawaharlal Nehru, a compilation edited by T. K. Mahadevan (1960), *passim*.



that were the stuff of politics then, feel "tremendous relief" and "afire with enthusiasm". It was not possible for him to sign on at once as a satyagrahi, for his father was very much against the idea—a good job, too, for it gave him time for reflection, and in any case, things happened so fast that the *Sabha* was entirely outpaced. On April 6, 1919, a *hartal* was called, the idea having come to Gandhi in a dream that there should be a general *hartal*, not just a normal stoppage of work but an act of self-purification by fasting and prayer. It was a fateful day in Indian history, for it touched off a movement bigger far and of a different type from what Gandhi had intended. The masses everywhere responded with electric enthusiasm, and in the Punjab, at Amritsar, there took place the Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre, when an unarmed crowd including many women and children, were trapped in a park, bounded by high walls on three sides, and were shot down in cold blood—"to make an impression", as the British officer commanding, General Dyer, said unashamedly later. On Government admission, 379 were killed and 1200 left wounded and uncared for on the spot—a tally bigger than that of the Indian terrorist movement in all its history. News of it, and of what followed, was suppressed at first; then it filtered through, incredible and stupefying, and excitement changed to fury and the country was roused as never before.

"Helplessly and impotently", Jawaharlal wrote, "we waited for scraps of news and bitterness filled our hearts." Gandhi, however, as his biographer Tendulkar has recorded, was more shocked by the people's violent spirit than by Government's atrocities. He said the entire *Satyagraha* campaign had been "a Himalayan miscalculation" and called off the movement on April 18. Our politics was still dwarfish and timorous; when Rabindranath Tagore in deep anguish flung back his knighthood the country acclaimed him but Congress, meeting in December 1919 in stricken Amritsar, made no mention of it. The All-India Congress Committee demanded an independent enquiry into the Punjab events, but Gandhi,

pressed from all sides to proceed there regardless of consequences, decided not to do so when the Viceroy refused permission for the visit and could go only in mid-October. Even so, he was received in the Punjab with unprecedented enthusiasm, and the Congress enquiry conducted by Motilal Nehru, C. R. Das, M. R. Jayakar and Abbas Tyabji, with Gandhi as their principal adviser, gave Jawaharlal, who was assisting in the work, not only first-hand knowledge of what had happened but also an inkling into Gandhi's mind. Jayakar has left it on record how punctilious Gandhi was in sifting out what he thought was the truth. Das and the elder Nehru would strongly press their views while Gandhi spoke in a weak voice but with irresistible logic and finally Das would wind up with the remark: 'Damn it all, Gandhi. You are right and we are wrong.'<sup>4</sup> What must have struck everybody was that in spite of Gandhi's *bizarrieries* and his peculiar hesitancy before reaching firm conclusions, his approach was principled and dispassionate. It was a quality which soon made a conquest of Jawaharlal who had an ache for first principles even as his emotions were swayed by the storms and stresses of that period.

It was in Amritsar (December 1919) that Gandhi made his real entry into Congress politics. In spite of the April happenings, for which the president, Motilal Nehru, said they had met "in deep mourning", the tone of the proceedings was tame. Tilak and Das wanted to obstruct and reject the Montagu-Chelmsford "Reforms", but Gandhi and Malaviya proposed working them and a compromise formula was evolved. Gandhi had even secured passage of a resolution blaming not only Government but also the people of the Punjab and Gujerat for "excesses" committed on their side. To a country that was seething his advice was that it should "settle down quietly to work", and he began to write in his paper 'Young India' of "constructive" as well as "cleansing

<sup>4</sup> Nanda, *op. cit.*, P. 170, quoting from M. R. Jayakar, "The Story of My Life." Vol. I, P. 322.



satyagraha".<sup>5</sup> There is nowhere any indication in Jawaharlal's writings of perturbation or dismay when at the Amritsar Congress, Tilak, Motilal and Gandhi joined in "grateful and loyal thanks" for the King-Emperor's proclamation which had asked for "bitterness" to be "obliterated."

Even so, the tide of mass unrest in India was soon to flow over so that Gandhi, with his ear attuned to the earth and also as it were, to the soul of his people, did have to take the tide at the flood. And there ensued, in 1920-22, the days of glory and of despair, when over the *Khilafat* issue Muslims had joined hands with Hindus and the great movement of non-violent non-cooperation swept over India and gave us visions of the promised land of freedom. "Many of us", wrote Jawaharlal, "who worked for the Congress programme lived in a kind of intoxication during the year 1921."<sup>6</sup> Gandhi's ways were often strange; he would say emphatically that *Swaraj* (freedom) was coming on September 30, and then, even more firmly, by December 31, 1921; the laughter of Motilal and the angry protests of several colleagues would not budge him from asking the Congress Working Committee that people needed to be trained in hand-spinning before being allowed to offer civil disobedience.<sup>7</sup> But there was something about the man which not only made the masses rave about him but deeply impressed and won unbreakable attachment from hard-headed people who would not be swept off their feet for anything. Thus Jawaharlal, watching Gandhi, would recall stories in Indian mythology of "great ascetics who, by the rigour of their sacrifices and self-imposed penance, built up a mountain of merit which threatened the dominion of some of the lesser gods and upset the established order." "He (Gandhi) was obviously not of the world's ordinary coinage; he was minted of a different and rare variety, and often the un-

<sup>5</sup> Hiren Mukerjee: "Gandhiji" (Calcutta, 1958), P. 48; in his "Autobiography" (P. 44), Nehru calls Amritsar "the first Gandhi Congress."

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 69.

<sup>7</sup> Nanda, *op. cit.*, P. 194, quoting from Krishnadas, "Seven Months with Mahatma Gandhi", Vol. I, P. 410.

known stared at us through his eyes."<sup>8</sup> That Jawaharlal felt a victim, willingly, to the Gandhi spell was no surprise, for it was as if he was waiting for the thing to happen. His early training, his stay abroad, the charming sophistication he had acquired and his generous impulses gave rise in his mind and heart, when he came in touch with the reality of life in his country, to an ache which refused to be soothed till he had some glimpses of a way out of an insensate situation. He saw none who could say, as Gandhi did in an early speech (February 14, 1916): "This may all sound nonsensical; well, India is a country of nonsense . . .", where "these nonsensical men" would solve their problems." It was altogether a new voice in India's public life, the voice of a man who had risen, as it were, out of India's very earth, a man who said queer, contradictory, impossible things and yet with an urgency and compulsion of conviction that was never encountered before.

Jawaharlal felt acutely, and then as always, was eager for basic change in the set-up he saw around him, but he never could be sure, except in generalities, of the shape of things that he wanted. He was not, either then or later, cast in a very positive political mould; he saw too many aspects of a thing at the same time and could not overcome hesitations and scruples and take a downright stand. He was not made of the stuff of revolutionaries who have to be determined and doubt-free, even at the cost of certain crudities and a readiness to be ruthless. In his own way Gandhi was a revolutionary, but Jawaharlal was not, and even as he followed, as he thought, the master, his foot-steps left very different imprints. Jawaharlal's distinctive quality, in politics and in life, was his sensitivity, his quick and acute response to impressions, a peculiar delicacy of perception and an innate fastidiousness, which, often in his public and private life, gave him a kind of anguish as well as of ecstasy that others differently endowed were insensibly spared. At the same



time he had a feeling for life and a healthy, wide-ranging and incessantly curious intelligence which saved him from the pitfall of sentimental indulgence in varieties of frustration as well as of a superior, if rather easily vaunted, cynicism. With his penchant for science, he had a preference for getting things done rather than talking prettily about them and this also, by a kind of paradox, drew him towards Gandhi who, in spite of what he himself called his 'crank-ims', was a superbly practical person. Jawaharlal's restlessness in those days when the storm rumbled and broke and rumbled again in India could be soothed and tamed and set to work only by the magic touch which Gandhi had brought to bear on the political scene. No wonder that Jawaharlal, recalling those early days of contact with the master, thought of the impact that Socrates in the 5th century B.C. had made on the minds of such as Plato and Alcibiades.<sup>10</sup> Gandhi to him, was "a beam of light that pierced the darkness and removed the scales from our eyes." It was, for him, initiation in the classical Indian sense, something like the *guru's* vouchsafing of insight to a worthy disciple, so that he could have his second birth, so to speak, into a life to be lived on a higher plane.

Lest it be thought that there was anything esoteric about it all, certain things should be remembered. In 1920, the Congress met at a special session in September at Calcutta and then again at its regular annual meeting in December at Nagpur to launch, under Gandhi's direction, the great movement of non-violent non-co-operation which shook the foundations of Britain's empire in India. Even earlier, Jawaharlal happened to have gone through direct experiences which cemented his bonds with Gandhi. The Nehrus, like other rich Indians, used to spend part of every summer in some hill station or other, and in May 1920 Jawaharlal was having a holiday with his wife and his mother in Mussoorie. A delegation from Afghanistan were putting up in the same

<sup>10</sup> "The Discovery of India", P. 363.







hotel, and with its usual fat-headedness Government decided that Jawaharlal, then a budding celebrity, must not associate with the Afghans and asked him to give an undertaking to that effect. This was, of course, refused, and Jawaharlal, exiled from Mussoorie, returned alone to his home in Allahabad. The irritation, which was at that time not very unusual, at this petty official pin-prick would have passed off soon, but then things began to happen. Some two hundred peasants had trudged to the town from fifty miles away to draw attention to the crushing exactions of landholders and the enormities they suffered. Jawaharlal went to Partabgarh with some colleagues, stayed three days in the villages, came back to Allahabad and then went again—right through 1921 he continued his visits to the rural areas till he knew well the entire province and the condition of the peasants. That first visit, however, was an eye-opener; it was as if he discovered a whole new world so long hidden from his sight. "I was filled with shame and sorrow", he wrote, "shame at my own easy-going and comfortable life and our petty politics of the city which ignored this vast multitude of semi-naked sons and daughters of India, sorrow at the degradation and overwhelming poverty of India. A new picture of India seemed to rise before me, naked, starving, crushed and utterly miserable."<sup>11</sup> This was not only a new experience, but a new awakening, to dimensions of life of which he had not been aware. Sympathy for suffering was no longer a mere sentiment to be indulged at will, but a part of one's being. "Perhaps", he has written, "there was some kind of electricity in the air, perhaps I was in a receptive frame of mind and the pictures I saw and the impressions I gathered were indelibly impressed on my mind." And speaking to his people, in simple words that they could understand and with imageries they could take in, Jawaharlal for the first time learnt to shed his disinclination towards public speaking. It was, in every sense of the term, an educative experience,

<sup>11</sup> "Autobiography", Chapters VIII and IX, *passim*; also "Towards Freedom", Pp. 56-57.

and a turning point in his life.

If he was not already known as one of Gandhi's men, the peasants would not have approached him. And if he had not, for some reason, listened to the peasants' appeal and visited their villages, it is likely that he would perhaps not have found it in him to follow Gandhi's bidding the way he did, especially when his father and others whom he admired like C. R. Das were not ready to say 'ditto' to the Mahatma. His understanding of the springs of Gandhi's greatness, already considerable at a certain level, would not perhaps have led to a kind of fusion of minds and almost a self-surrender, without this visible and vital reinforcement of faith in the Gandhian way which an immediate and active sharing of the peasants' sorrow lent him. Without this experience, he could hardly say of Gandhi as he did later: "He did not descend from the top; he seemed to emerge from the millions of India, speaking their language and incessantly drawing attention to them and their appalling condition. Get off the backs of these peasants and workers, he told us, all you who live by their exploitation; get rid of the system which produced this poverty and misery."<sup>12</sup>

His wanderings among the *Kisans* gladdened his father's heart for a very different reason than what was in his own mind. "If one or two more visits like this to other parts of Partabgarh district can be arranged," wrote Motilal on June 14, 1920, "there will be some chance for a pure nationalist getting into the Council in spite of the Raja Bahadur of Partabgarh."<sup>13</sup> For Jawaharlal it was an experience in the nature of a climacteric; he saw the reality that was India, felt irrevocably linked with Gandhi, was enabled to shake off his stage-fright in public gatherings, found his political sense fortified by socio-economic understanding, and almost in spite of himself discovered his own unique mass-appeal.

At this point of time, Jawaharlal must also have made his own contribution towards converting his father to a com-

<sup>12</sup> Cf. "Gandhi Marg", *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> Nanda, *op. cit.*, P. 181.



plete alliance with Gandhi's politics. In 1919 Motilal, unconvinced of the merits of jail-going, had disapproved of his son throwing in his lot with satyagrahis (secretly, being the fond father that he was, he tried sleeping on the floor to get an idea of what his son might have to do in jail), and Gandhi himself, unwilling to precipitate matters and always shrewdly practical, advised Jawaharlal against any hasty step. In 1920, Motilal was faced again with the dilemma that his son's conversion to Gandhi's ways had posed before him. He did not fancy Gandhi's wholehogging idea of boycott—boycott not only of the Courts, which he was ready for, but of the legislatures to be elected under the new reforms scheme. He and his family had been accustomed to a life not only of comfort but of luxury, and it was not easy to break with it. At nearly sixty years of age, one finds it difficult to change a lifetime's habits. Motilal did make his choice, however—after all, an ascetic streak often lies beneath the surface in our lives, and the times were stirring, the Nehru family drinking deeply in its exultations. At the special congress in Calcutta (September 1920) Motilal was the only front-ranker to declare himself wholly with Gandhi, and perhaps, as is often suggested, the son had a hand in this decision. It is evident, however, that Motilal's mind had long been working in the same direction; he was, as he said himself, "a born rebel", and in the new air that was blowing over India he could not do otherwise than he did.<sup>14</sup>

Nineteen hundred and twentyone saw a great sweep onward of the movement of our masses, without precedent in our history. A sleeping giant, now awakened, wanted to shake his invincible locks in a manner that did not always fit into the pattern laid down by Gandhi. It was clear that the people wanted to go faster than their leaders, but that story cannot be told here. Suffice it to say that even Jawaharlal, pledged in his soul to following the dictates of the Mahatma, wrote later that on the subject of Swaraj Gandhi

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Pp. 160, 183-86.



was "delightfully vague . . . and did not encourage clear thinking on the subject either", but of course, "we all felt he was a great and unique man and a glorious leader, and having put our faith in him, we gave him an almost blank cheque, for the time being at least". Subhas Chandra Bose, later to be hailed as *Netaji* and for long, with Jawaharlal, the spokesman of India's militant youth, was then a young enthusiast who had thrown up his appointment in the much-coveted Indian Civil Service, and he has recorded that in his talks with Gandhi he failed to gather "a clear conception of the tactics whereby the hands of the Government could be forced." Jawaharlal in 1921 was Secretary of the United Provinces Congress Committee, an important position, though he was not by any means then in the front rank, where apart from Gandhi there were Motilal, C. R. Das, Lajpat Rai, Vijayaraghavachariar, along with a grand Muslim crowd, Hakim Ajmal Khan, the Ali Brothers, Mazharul Huq, Abul Kalam Azad. "We had a sense of inner peace", wrote Jawaharlal of those days, when he had his hands full with the work of agitation, propaganda and organization.<sup>15</sup> In December 1921, by which time nearly 30,000 people had been sent to prison as political offenders, both the Nehrus were arrested and sentenced. The *elan* of the country was such, however, that going to jail had almost become a festive occasion and there was expectation everywhere of some worthwhile recompense for the trials and tribulations that the country had welcomed so ardently.

While most of the leaders were in prison, Gandhi abruptly terminated the long delayed plans of civil disobedience in February 1922. This was on account of an attack (which was initially provoked by the other side) on a police station in Chauri Chaura, a remote U.P. village and the killing of twenty two policemen by the infuriated mob. As in 1919, but in a period of incomparably greater expectations, Gandhi listened, he said, to "the still, small voice"

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 192. Nehru: "Autobiography", Pp. 73-76; Subhas Ch. Bose: "The Indian Struggle", 1920-34, P. 68.

within, called Chauri Chaura "the bitterest humiliation", humbled himself and the country "before God and man", and called off the campaign. All India, insensible of the refinements of non-violent philosophy, literally "reeled" to hear that civil disobedience had been suspended, and "a constructive programme" of spinning, anti-untouchability, temperance and educational work was offered in its stead. "I know", wrote Gandhi, "that the drastic reversal of practically the whole of the aggressive programme may be politically unsound and unwise, but there is no doubt that it is religiously sound". It was, to most Indians, a staggering statement, and the country was plunged into the deepest gloom.

Deshbandhu C. R. Das, Motilal Nehru, Lajput Rai and other leaders then in jail were angry and bewildered at this sudden turn given to a great movement. Gandhi met with serious opposition in the All-India Congress Committee, but he had his way by insisting that he knew more than the others about non-violence and it was for him to conduct the movement along non-violent lines or not at all. Jawaharlal in jail, more willing than many others to give Gandhi the benefit of the doubt, expressed his dismay in a letter which Gandhi described as "a freezing dose" and in a lengthy communication asserted: "I assure you that if the thing had not been suspended we would have been leading not a non-violent struggle but essentially a violent struggle."<sup>16</sup> From Gandhi's letter it appears that Jawaharlal, like the others, had been "terribly cut up". Indeed, when civil disobedience was stopped, India was, according to some official reports, in sight of the success of the movement. However, in his autobiography, Jawaharlal later sought in a halting manner to defend Gandhi's decision. The movement might have got out of hand, he wrote, and a bloody struggle ensued, which the Government would very likely have won. Obviously, he thought nothing on the lines of Karl Marx's dictum that history would indeed be easy to make on the basis of infinite-

<sup>16</sup> J. Nehru, "A Bunch of Old Letters" (1958), Pp. 22-24.



ly infallible chances. And even Jawaharlal, in his mood of special pleading, had to admit that there did take place, after the decision at Bardoli to call off the movement, demoralisation which was dangerous in its consequences all over India. "It is possible that this sudden bottling of a great movement contributed to a tragic development in the country . . . the suppressed violence had to find a way out and in the following years this perhaps aggravated the communal trouble."<sup>17</sup>

Over and over again, in subsequent years, Jawaharlal would differ sharply from Gandhi, write to him anguished letters, sometimes not mincing his words, but then, over issues of great moment, would yield to his master, rejoicing, as it were, in a spiritual thralldom that he could not always entirely justify to himself. Some of these letters are remarkable, not only of political but also perhaps of psychological interest. A typical, and widely known, example was his having been, as he wrote, "talked into signing" what was known as the Delhi Manifesto of Oct.-Nov. 1929. Jawaharlal was then the president-elect of the Lahore Congress which was to proclaim the goal of complete independence, and yet, in answer to a British declaration regarding "India's goal of Dominion Status" in some unspecified future, he allowed himself to be wheedled into signing a welcoming statement along with Gandhi, his father Motilal, Mrs. Besant, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and others. He later regretted his action as "wrong and dangerous", but then, he added with charming naïveté, he was "calmed by a soothing letter from Gandhiji".<sup>18</sup> Between the two there was, not unoften, serious disputation on fundamental matters,<sup>19</sup> but invariably almost, as far as action went, Jawaharlal would yield. This is difficult to explain; he himself once wrote that in relation to Bapu, "it is even difficult to understand by the cold light of reason why each one of us behaved as he or she did." As late as June 9, 1957, in a personal letter to the author of these

<sup>17</sup> "Autobiography", P. 86; Bose, *op. cit.* ...

<sup>18</sup> See H. Mukerjee, "Gandhiji", Pp. 84-85, and references therein.

<sup>19</sup> "Gandhi Marg" publishes a selection of such correspondence under the caption, "The Days of Rebellion".



lines, he wrote: "I find that whenever I think of him, I get emotionally worked up, and that is no mood for proper writing. If I was a poet, which I am not, perhaps that mood might help." He was trying to explain that he could not "attempt any kind of a long account or appraisal of Gandhiji's work", which, he thought, was for other people to do. Even so, the fragments that he has written (or spoken) about Gandhi have been put down together, and they have a moving, poetic quality,<sup>20</sup> in spite of Jawaharlal's disclaimer of poetic virtues. And perhaps a speciality of India's history in the last forty years or so has been this tinge of poetry in political life, which detracted no doubt from success as it is normally reckoned, and in an unforgivingly practical world plunged us into shallows and miseries, but helped us also to escape from a certain squalor and triviality which mars much of the world's politics.

## CHAPTER IV

### PROBATION—IN AND OUT OF JAIL

Deliberately and openly to court imprisonment was the badge of the *satyagrahi*, the tribe that Gandhi had called into being, and often enough Jawaharlal put on this badge. Between 1921 and 1945, jail was almost his second home ; nine times he returned to it, sometimes for short terms, but totalling a period in jail of about nine years—a good slice of his adult life, away from family, from friends and from the work that sustained his ever unquiet spirit. In April 1922, after a respite of six or seven weeks, he returned to Lucknow district jail for his second term, and he has written in his autobiography of “the various humours that prison produces”, added on to the bad news which in spite of rigid censorship trickled through from outside regarding the fate of the movement. “It would be the lot of many of us”, he knew then, “to spend a great part of our lives in prison”, a not too cheering thought, but redeemed by the sense of having acted rightly whatever the consequences and in tune with the country’s self-respect and dignity. Jawaharlal was not the man, however, to overrate his virtues as a jail-going hero, and in the same book later noted that “hundreds and thousands in our own day have suffered infinitely more, even to the point of the last sacrifice.” “My reputation as a hero,” he added, “is entirely a bogus one, and I do not feel at all heroic, and generally the heroic attitude or the dramatic pose in life strikes me as silly.” Most Indian celebrities have a heavy-handed way of saying and doing things, which makes Jawaharlal look somewhat singular, but his kind of singularity must have had, deep down, much appeal for our people or they could not have taken this apparently alien character so very much to their heart.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Autobiography”, Pp. 90-97, 205.



One may recall his charming and meaningful observations in the autobiography *a propos* of an incident in early 1930 when he was asked by a friend what he thought were the reasons of his popularity and if he liked the hero-worship he was receiving. He was at that time, "to young men and women a bit of a hero", and had "achieved, almost accidentally as it were, an unusual degree of popularity with the masses", as well as the appreciation of the intelligentsia. "Only a saint, or perhaps an inhuman monster could survive all this, unscathed and unaffected." "It went to my head, intoxicated me a little," he said, but he had a habit of introspection and a certain detachment which helped him to keep his balance. He became perhaps, he thought, "just a little bit autocratic in my ways, just a shade dictatorial", but he had sense enough not to forget that popularity by itself was no great thing and was "often the handmaiden of undesirable persons". One reason, though not the basic reason of his popularity had something to do with "snobbery", the idea being that he, like his family, had been in high society and had lived a life of luxury (about which many "fantastic and absurd" legends even had come to be circulated) and that he had renounced it all—renunciation having "always appealed to the Indian mind". He frankly stated that "renunciation and sacrifices for their own sake have little appeal for me," but he valued them as contributory to mental and spiritual training, "just as a simple and regular life is necessary for the athlete to keep in good physical condition." "I have no liking or attraction," he went on, almost echoing some of Rabindranath's thoughts, "for the ascetic view of life, the negation of life, the terrified abstention from its joys and sensations. I have not consciously renounced anything that I really valued, but then values change."

What then, was his reaction to the hero-worship he received? "I disliked it," he said, "and wanted to run away from it, and yet I had got used to it, and when it was wholly absent, rather missed it." Here, indeed, is a clue to this fascinating man's character: "the crowd," he averred, "had



filled some inner need of mine." They gave him a sense of authority and to some extent satisfied his "will to power." "On their part, they exercised a subtle tyranny over me, for their confidence and affection moved inner depths within me and evoked emotional responses. Individualist as I was, sometimes the barriers of individuality seemed to melt away, and I felt that it would be better to be accursed with these unhappy people than to be saved alone." The barriers between him and them, however, remained, "too solid to disappear," causing a "phenomenon which I failed to understand." He might, he says, have fallen victim to conceit which, "like fat on the human body, grows imperceptibly, layer upon layer" without one's being conscious of "the daily accretion", but the hard knocks of life toned it down, and luckily for himself he had in his family and among friends quite a good few who would delight in pulling his leg over the adulation he got from crowds—the "Jewel of India" would feel somewhat deflated when asked at table to be good enough to pass on the salt! However, the dust and tumble of politics, with all that it involved, touched him, he said, on the surface only, "though sometimes the touch was sharp and pointed". "My real conflict lay within me, a conflict of ideas, desires and loyalties, of subconscious depths struggling with outer circumstances, of an inner hunger unsatisfied. I became a battle-ground, where various forces struggled for mastery. I sought an escape from this; I tried to find harmony and equilibrium, and in this attempt I rushed into action. That gave me some peace; outer conflict relieved the strain of the inner struggle."

These extended quotations, deliberately reproduced, give an inkling of his mind and his attitude towards the masses in his own incomparable words. And it will be noted how much more perceptive and revealing were these meditations than what he wrote somewhat carelessly later in a famous passage about his explaining to people about their being "parts of Bharat Mata, Mother India", whereupon

"their eyes would light up as if they had made a great discovery."<sup>2</sup>

It was no accident that in jail he wrote, apart from numerous letters, at least one masterpiece, "An Autobiography" and two other volumes, "Glimpses of World History" and "The Discovery of India" which, in spite of being somewhat unequal in quality, were by no means mere *tours de force* (which they may sometimes appear to be) but in parts so moving and so aesthetically chaste that admiration overflows. It seems he told one of his biographers, Michael Brecher, that the "Discovery of India" incorporated his most considered thoughts on 'Life's Philosophy'; to a reader, however, they appear rather in a jumble which he cannot quite ferret out and posit clearly, while his very uncertainties in the "Autobiography" reflect a kind of purity in thought which illumines the style. "Before I started writing there [in prison], I allowed a mood to develop", he wrote in a letter recently, "and when it came, I sat down to write and wrote on."<sup>3</sup>

It was not, of course, just that simple. The mood could develop because the delicate mechanism of his mind was affected by things, big and small, which were to most others quite irrelevant; the sight of a nest of crows in a hostile jail-yard would touch a chord in him, just as would rain-clouds transfiguring the atmosphere. And things happened, while he was in jail, to his family, to his country and the movement which had from time to time affected the whole gamut of his emotions and touched off thoughts, so that for one who was so sensitive and so brisk it was incumbent to put them down in words that came with graceful spontaneity.

In the early days of jail life, Jawaharlal made up his mind to catch up with his reading which he had neglected since his return from England. In a letter to his father he referred to "the uninspiring conversation of the Bar



Library, the continuous contact with the sordid side of human nature and the absence of any organised intellectual life", which had promised to be his portion "till the high gods took us in hand and removed us from the ruts." Jail meant cruel constraint, even when creature comforts were not entirely refused, but he always tried to make light of it, engaging himself in exercise and study, some effort at gardening, and in work to make his comrades in jail less unhappy. In 1930, stung by reports of Government repression he asked his father not to send him fruit or ice in Naini jail, not far from his Allahabad home; he could not, he wrote, "hold high festival in gaol, when imprisonment, floggings, firings and martial law are the lot of those outside." On an earlier occasion, he had known of a young boy who called himself Azad and as a leader of north Indian terrorists died later after a fight with the police, being stripped and whipped for breach of gaol discipline, but shouting "Mahatma Gandhi-ki-Jai" every time a stripe fell on him till he fainted away. It was in jail in April 1932 that he learnt, after the lapse of a week, of his mother having been beaten up for having taking part in a procession in Allahabad. At that time, Motilal Nehru was dead and his widow, who had so long kept himself out of political work, had decided she could do so no longer. "The thought of my frail old mother lying bleeding on the dusty road", wrote Jawaharlal, "obsessed me, and I wondered how I would have behaved if I had been there. How far would my non-violence have carried me? Not very far, I fear ....". Later in 1932, when his mother and his wife, both in very delicate health, were in prison, he had occasion once to flare up and write to the jail authorities: "I cannot tolerate even the suspicion of an affront or an insult to my mother and my wife." Jawaharlal always had the fairness to note that for certain reasons he generally had better treatment in jail than did most others, but "prison humours", as he calls one of the chapters in his autobiography, were usually unpleasant. "Sometimes", he wrote, "a physical longing would



come for the soft things of life—bodily comfort, pleasant surroundings, the company of friends, games with children". A lover of animals, he would even watch "creeping or crawling or flying insects" which "lived their life without interfering with me in any way and I saw no reason why I should interfere with them". After an unfriendly encounter with a wasp and its family, he even settled down to co-existence with it, and "for over a year I lived in that cell, surrounded by wasps and hornets, and they never attacked me, and we respected each other". That he would be friends with squirrels and parrots and kittens can be easily guessed—he even learnt how one could feed an orphaned baby squirrel, a fountain pen filler, with a little cotton wool attached, making an efficient feeding bottle!\*

To one of the chapters in his autobiography, Jawaharlal gave the title "Desolation". It is poignant testimony to the conflict in his soul over some of the ways that Gandhi used to have, ways which would affect a whole nation's history. While in jail, in April 1934 he had learnt of Gandhi's termination of all forms of civil disobedience, principally because "a valued companion of long standing was found reluctant to perform the full prison task, preferring his private studies to the allotted task". It was not Jawaharlal whom he had in mind, but it was all so absurd that Jawaharlal reacted very strongly. "This seemed to be a monstrous proposition and an immoral one", he wrote. "With a stab of pain I felt that the cords of allegiance that had bound me to him for many years had snapped." He felt "very lonely in that cell of Alipore gaol" and "life seemed to be a dreary affair, a very wilderness of desolation". Then he added memorable words which reveal something of the tortured soul that he had sternly taught himself to keep in leash: "Of the many hard lessons that I had learnt, the hardest and the most painful now faced me: that it is not possible in any vital matter to rely on any one. One must journey through life alone; to

\* Nanda, *op. cit.*, Pp. 211, 351; "A Bunch of Old Letters", Pp. 106-08; "An Autobiography", Pp. 97, 350, 353-57.

rely on others is to invite heartbreak". These words are almost an echo of a famous Tagore song which Gandhi particularly liked ; it is notable that Jawaharlal was driven to meditation about "the will to truth" being very different from "the will to believe", and about a kind of so-called non-violence which "without doing any outward physical injury, outrages the mind and crushes the spirit and breaks the heart". However, he controlled "the commotion within" by calling to mind, almost as a succour, the wonder that Gandhī with all his oddities was, "his amazing and almost irresistible charm and subtle power over people". To that power, indeed, he had decided to give himself up ; it was not an entire self-surrender, yet it gave him sustenance and strength when he needed it. But he had to rely often enough on himself, as when his wife Kamala lay dying and he languished in jail, "every hour a burden and a horror", with "bad news and waiting for news". He was not by nature an introvert, but "prison life, like strong coffee or strychnine leads to introversion!" He made some fun of it, but in a way it was a lucky thing, for long terms in jail, faced with courage and with humour, helped to shape facets of his personality, and with great good sense he wrote beautifully about it all.<sup>5</sup>

Jawaharlal's probation to pre-eminence had begun in right earnest in 1920-21 when, with his father, he was drawn by the Gandhi magic, sensing "the happiness of a person crusading for a cause" and in the midst of strife "an inner peace"—"nearer to a religious frame of mind", he wrote, "than at any other time since my early boyhood". He had his apprenticeship in journalism, writing editorials for and generally looking after his father's "Independent" in 1920 ; when in the late 'thirties he started the "National Herald" and often wrote articles for it, he was not embarking on an unfamiliar enterprise. In the year of non-co-operation he was Secretary of the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh)

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Pp. 504-513, 566-67, 571-72 ; Nanda, *op. cit.*, Pp. 83-84.



Congress Committee, then as now an important assignment full of difficulties typical of what Mohammed Ali called the "Disunited Provinces". Till early 1923, but for a short intermission, he was in jail; and when he came out the Congress was divided into no-changers and pro-changers, the former adhering rigidly to the Gandhi programme and the latter, led by C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru, favouring entry into the Legislative Councils, not in order to work the "Reforms" but to paralyze the unwanted experiment by persistent obstruction. Jawaharlal did not align himself with either group, though it appears that while in jail he had recognized the inevitability of a parliamentary phase of the struggle following the failure of direct action.<sup>6</sup> He took no sides, however, though C. R. Das himself, for whom he had great respect, tried to win him over; his father, characteristically, did nothing to appear to be influencing him. Jawaharlal was in favour of an understanding between the two groups so that they could co-exist without acrimony; this was also the desire of two big Congress stalwarts, Muhammad Ali and Abul Kalam Azad who presided over Congress sessions, the former at Coconada (1923) and the latter in the special meeting at Delhi a little earlier. In his public utterances, as at a conference of Congress volunteers during the Coconada session, Jawaharlal stressed discipline as the essential pre-condition of victory. A little earlier, he had acted as secretary of a short-lived working committee, which represented centrist views as between the conflicting pro-changers and no-changers. It was a futile experiment, notable only for the experience of *real-politik* that he got, for he was "quite shocked at the way some prominent Congressmen could intrigue," and discovered that the role of a buffer between fighting groups was always thankless. He was in 1924 and 1925 one of the general secretaries of the all India Congress Committee, evidence of the status he was coming to acquire in national politics. Maulana Muhammad

<sup>6</sup> Cf. letter from Mahadev Desai, *Ibid.*, P. 215.



Ali, then Congress President, chided him for his "misplaced modesty" in being unwilling to undertake the post. "My dear Jawahar", he wrote, "it is just because some members of the Working Committee distrust and dislike your presence as Secretary that *I like it*. . . . So do be cheerful and let us start work".<sup>7</sup>

A little earlier, he had "a strange and unexpected adventure" in Nabha, a Sikh state which the British, after deposing the Maharaja, was then administering directly. He had been invited to observe demonstrations by Akali Sikhs who, protesting against corrupt *mahants* of some shrines, had incurred the displeasure of the administration which was the protector of all vested interests. Along with his colleagues he was ordered to leave the territory of Nabha at once, and when they declined to oblige, were arrested, handcuffed and chained to a policeman and were paraded down the main street. It was a humiliation which Nehru tried to temper by drawing upon his sense of humour, but the somewhat Gilbertian trial he got and the filthy cell to which he was taken were a further shock. In farcical court proceedings he was sentenced on two counts to six months and eighteen months, but luckily, pressure from outside the State, exerted without Jawaharlal's knowing, secured suspension of the sentence, and they were allowed to leave. It was an education for him, just as his encounter with the life of peasants in his province had been in 1920-21. It opened his eyes to what passed for administration in the "Native States", where the British reaped the fruits of a continuing feudalism and the people were bereft of all rights. It was a costly education, however, for he had contracted typhoid in Nabha's rat-infested jail and lay seriously ill for a long time, unusual for one who kept himself thoroughly fit and was, as he once put it, "disgustingly healthy."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> 'A Bunch of Old Letters', Pp. 33-35, it is sad to recall that Muhammad Ali and some other stalwarts would perhaps not have left the national movement if there were in Congress more men in leading positions who had the Nehrus' shining secularism.

<sup>8</sup> Nanda, *op. cit.*, Pp. 217-23; "An Autobiography", Pp. 109-17.

Early in 1924, Gandhi, then doing his six-year term in jail, got an acute attack of appendicitis, and was persuaded, in spite of his allergy towards modern medicine, to be operated upon in hospital. The operation was successful, but Government in its discretion released him unconditionally before completion of his prison sentence. This was a time when the Congress was divided, the Swarajists led by Das and the elder Nehru calling for entry into legislatures which Gandhi and his orthodox followers thought deviation from principle. Jawaharlal had his qualms about the merits of a constitutional approach to politics even as he grew doubtful about Gandhi's preoccupation with spinning and what he called the "constructive programme". He was perhaps even more disturbed by the deterioration in Hindu-Muslim relations which seemed suddenly to have taken place and was in strikingly sombre contrast with the great days of fraternisation in 1919-22. This deterioration was to bedevil Indian politics henceforth, and its taint would only occasionally be wiped off whenever the country plunged in struggle and its collective ecstasies. In 1927, thus, Jawaharlal writing to a friend was driven to exclaim: "I have no patience left with the legitimate and illegitimate offspring of religion."<sup>1</sup> This was a period when he was unsure of direction, also perhaps rather unhappy, for he could not but drift away from the moorings to which Gandhi had taught him to tie his boat even as he felt the emotional bond with him getting, if anything, stronger. These were "lean years" for Jawaharlal, his father being very much more in the centre of the stage and by patient manoeuvre securing Gandhi's acquiescence in the Swarajists dominating Indian politics.

Jawaharlal found outlet for his energy in such work as he could do (1923-25) as elected chairman of the Allahabad Municipality. He took his job very seriously and, worked hard, trying to inject some imaginative quality into the

<sup>1</sup> Quotation in M. Brecher, *op. cit.*, P. 50.



humdrum tasks of local administration. He would be diverted by an occasional quasi-official move to win him over to acceptance—why not?—even of a ministership, as when Sir Grimwood Mears, then Chief Justice of Allahabad High Court, suggested to him in a diplomatic and entirely cordial conversation about the opportunities for great work open to Indian talent, almost immediately after he had returned from prison.<sup>10</sup> Municipal work, he thought, was “worthy”, but in his scheme of things, “secondary”, and his politics was such that he could not touch with a pair of tongs such puny prizes as ministership with truncated power.

This period of recession in India's struggle for freedom was, in a way, seed-time for the next political harvest, and along with the good seed much weed, it is clear, was also being planted. In this period Gandhi, in his quiet way, sometimes keeping entirely out of the Congress organization, was pursuing, it seems, a threefold policy: he persuaded himself to bless the effort of the Swarajist leadership to utilize the legislatures and strengthen, as it was thereby enabled to do, the position of the Indian bourgeoisie; he diverted the energies of many honest and zealous Congressmen from militant political work to activities mainly of social reform, so interpreted as to rouse their idealism; he built a network of independent organizations like the All India Khadi Board and later the All India Spinners' Association which would remain a constantly ready nucleus for political struggle whenever Gandhi deemed fit to call it into being. The frustration, that was now in the air was, however, not being fought properly. There was a rift in the lute amongst the Swarajists, some being drawn towards the lures of “responsive cooperation”, acceptance, that is to say, of political office under Government, and almost all shying away from mass movements and neglecting socio-economic problems which broke out, as it were, in communal and other derangements. From 1924-25, much more than in the period before it, Gandhi was

<sup>10</sup> “Autobiography”, Pp. 100-03, 142-47.



in close touch with "rich capitalists" who helped him with finance, creating as he himself said later, "a silent debt". Once Motilal Nehru, who had a healthy horror of communalism, even wrote to his son that he feared that Lajpat Rai and Malaviya, "aided by Birla's money" were trying to capture the Congress. It was a time of trial, which found us wanting and would later exact retribution.<sup>11</sup>

In March 1926, Jawaharlal left for Europe on an unhappy errand, for his wife was suffering from tuberculosis and was recommended treatment in Switzerland. At one time it seemed he could not go, for the U.P. Government wanted an undertaking that he would take no part in politics while abroad. At his father's instance, however, the Central Government advised the provincial administration not to ask for the undertaking, and Jawaharlal was enabled to go. He had expected to be away from India for about six months but he could not, in view of his wife's condition, return till December 1927. This period of absence, however, was by no means wasted ; on the contrary, it added richly to his experience and his insight. He saw, more clearly than he could from India, the powerful forces which were at work in world politics ; he could examine Indian politics in a fresh perspective and put its basic issues in the right focus. No stranger in Europe and yet tied umbilically with India, he could be, as none else in politics, the link between this country and the world outside.

"It was a quiet and restful period", Jawaharlal noted, "for both my mind and body". When his wife was a little better, he could leave his Swiss retreat and travel in France, England and Germany. Since he had been last in Europe, there had taken place a World War and revolutions and tremendous change. Now he observed with interest and sympathy the fever and the fret typical of a world in travail and studied the varied moods of Europe, the flow of ideas,

<sup>11</sup> Nanda, *op. cit.*, P. 169 ; G. D. Birla, "In the Shadow of the Mahatma", (1953), Pp. 15, 305 ; Louis Fischer, "Life of Mahatma Gandhi" (1951), Pp. 401-03.

the challenge of conflicting creeds, the struggles, open and veiled, of the Powers. Politics, like patriotism, was to him never enough, and so he went on 'pilgrimage' to Villeneuve where Romain Rolland lived, and made friends with the shy but ardent German visionary and poet, Ernst Toller. He met a number of Indian exiles and old revolutionaries like Shyamaji Krishnavarma and Mahendra Pratap, Madame Cama and Obeidullah Sindhi, Barkatullah and Virendranath Chattopadhyay, found them rather picturesque and *passé* than impressive, except for the last-named, to some extent, and M. N. Roy whom he met for a brief half-hour in Moscow. He saw England during the General Strike, London "in semi-darkness at night", and came face to face with the strikers confronting "class justice" which, he noted, was common enough in India but "somehow I had not expected to come across such a flagrant example of it in England." From abroad he worried over the Indian scene as when he learnt with anguish of the assassination by a communal fanatic of Swami Shraddhanand who, a Hindu ascetic, had once preached from the pulpit of Delhi's Jumma Masjid and was hailed with joyous cries of *Hindu-Musalman-ki-Jai*.<sup>12</sup>

In February 1927, he attended the "Congress of Oppressed Nationalities" at Brussels, Jawaharlal's de'but, so to speak, on the international stage on which, later in life, he would be a celebrity. He had earlier heard of this meeting from revolutionaries in Berlin, had approved of the idea and secured from home accreditation of himself on behalf of the Indian National Congress. Among its sponsors were Einstein, Romain Rolland and the British Labour leader, George Lansbury. Jawaharlal was elected to the presidium of the conference and to the nine-man executive committee of the League against Imperialism which was a body constituted by the conference. He took the precaution of securing prior sanction of the then Congress President, Srinivasa Iyengar, so that he could tell the conference equivocally that

<sup>12</sup> "Autobiography", Pp. 148-55, 160.



*Swaraj*, the declared goal of Congress, was not something vague, as was often conceived in India, but meant complete independence. He made a trenchant and hard-hitting speech at the Conference, condemning British imperialism in clear-cut terms, particularly with reference to India. He had a big hand in a joint resolution of British, Indian and Chinese delegates calling for immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops from Chinese territory and waters, and especially to secure at once the stoppage of British (and Indian) troops being despatched to China. In his report to the All India Congress Committee he referred also to the "rising imperialism of the United States" getting a throttle-hold over Central and South America. His recommendation, later accepted, was that the Congress should affiliate itself with the League and thus have a useful channel for propaganda as well as facilities for contact with other Asian nationalist movements. Subsequently, in late 1929, Jawaharlal's signature of the Delhi Manifesto (which whittled down the demand of complete independence and indicated readiness to be content with Dominion Status) got him into trouble with the League. The latter's critique of Gandhi's programme as "betrayal of the cause of workers and peasants" intensified the estrangement, and in 1930 all links between Nehru and the League were severed.

It was no wonder that Jawaharlal at this time found himself "the object of attention on the part of the British Secret Service" which he said was "the most perfect on the Continent". High officials warned his father in India that "Jawahar was sailing too near the wind"—which was one reason, Motilal wrote to Gandhi on May 6, 1927, "for my intended trip to Europe to escort the young gentleman safely home".

There is no doubting that "the young gentleman" had formed a genuine attraction for Communism, not so much on account of its ideology but of sincere admiration of the Soviet achievement and an aversion to and impatience of Social Democrats, represented as they were in Indian eyes by the British Labour Party. "I turned inevitably", he



wrote, "with goodwill towards Communism, for whatever its faults it was at least not hypocritical and not imperialistic". He never gave "doctrinal adherence" to Communism, either then or later, but was emotionally drawn towards the dream of a classless social order, often however waking up to feel repelled by some kink or other of communist practice. As he writes, characteristically: "But Communists often irritated me by their dictatorial ways, their aggressive and rather vulgar methods, their habit of denouncing everybody who did not agree with them. This reaction was no doubt due, as they would say, to my own bourgeois education and upbringing". It is no surprise that somewhat ruthless revolutionaries have often thought of Jawaharlal as a radical dilettante, and even sympathetic biographers of anti-Communist persuasion like Brecher have spoken of his "split mentality to Communism."<sup>13</sup>

Early in November 1927, Jawaharlal went with his father, wife and sister on a brief visit to Moscow. They had been officially invited to attend the tenth anniversary celebration of the Revolution, Motilal being hailed by *Pravda* as "one of the outstanding leaders of the Indian national movement", and his son as "leader of the left wing of the National Congress". Motilal, according to his son, was in spite of his aristocratic bent of mind "definitely impressed" and it is significant that during the debate in the Legislative Assembly over the notorious Public Safety Bill in 1928, he ridiculed the idea of Communism being painted as a spectre over India and praised the stupendous achievement of the Soviet Union in the sphere of education. It is notable also that, in his presidential address to the Calcutta Congress in December 1928, he warned that fate was "close upon our heels already in the garb of Socialism and will devour both complete independence and dominion status if you let it approach nearer". Jawaharlal published his "random sketches and impressions", which came out later

<sup>13</sup> "Autobiography", Pp. 161-65; Nanda, *op. cit.*, Pp. 254-55, 279-80; Brecher, *op. cit.*, Pp. 54-55.



in the form of a book, recording his discovery in Russia, with all her faults, of "the good society", where there was not the usual contrast between luxury and poverty, where literacy increased most remarkably, where the common people attended operas and ballets in the best theatres, where the prisons had been transformed. It needs to be remembered that this was in 1927, when the Soviets were far from being an affluent society, when they were almost quarantined in the sphere of international relations, when even the First Five Year Plan, heralding the saga of socialist construction, had not been launched. Soon afterwards he returned to India, maturer in mind yet mellow, as he always continued to be, in his approach to problems, importing, as it were, a whiff of fresh air into his country's politics. Hardened bureaucrats were scandalized at the views he now began to express, and one of the more distinguished among them, J. Coatman, who used to write the annual reports of Indian administration, blurted forth, with ignorant malice, in a book which came out in 1932: "Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru has now one secret ambition which is to rival Lenin or Stalin in the history of Communism".<sup>14</sup> The fact was that Jawaharlal had acquired firmly a wider perspective and the conviction that political freedom to be real implied social and economic justice and the elimination of exploitation, which was the aim of Socialism or Communism, whatever one's fears and doubts about its methods and mannerisms.

<sup>14</sup> Quotation from J. Coatman, "The Years of Destiny" (1932) in Nanda, *op. cit.*, P. 259; *Ibid.*, Pp. 280-81, 303; Brecher, *op. cit.*, Pp. 55-57; J. Nehru, "Autobiography", Pp. 164-65; "Soviet Russia" (1929), *passim*.

## CHAPTER V

### "THUNDER IN THE AIR"

Jawaharlal returned towards the end of 1927 to sense before long what he himself must have anticipated, namely, "thunder in the air".<sup>1</sup> Almost at once he clashed with Gandhi at the Madras Congress where at his instance a resolution was passed, declaring complete independence to be the goal of the Indian people. Gandhi was at the time theoretically in a sort of retirement, though he was travelling all over India and was not chary of giving advice to Congress leaders who sought it constantly. He had come to Madras for the Congress meeting, but was absent during much of the proceedings. He was angry at Jawaharlal's sheaf of radical resolutions. "By passing such resolutions," he exclaimed, "we make an exhibition of our impotence." He called the one on complete independence a "paper resolution" which could not be carried into effect. "We have almost sunk," he added, "to the level of a schoolboys' debating society." At Motilal's request, Gandhi had even considered, and decided on postponing, the idea of Jawaharlal being called to preside over the Madras session; Motilal had feared that his son's "habit of playing the role of the humble soldier in the presence of his great general may check the necessary assertiveness required for the occasion." Obviously it disturbed Gandhi that Jawaharlal whom he wanted to groom for his succession would surge over to zealous radicalism, proclaiming himself a "republican" and joining up with some whom Gandhi even went so far as to call "mischief-makers and hooligans". It was as if a favourite son had gone truculent and had earned a rebuke. "I love you too well to restrain my pen," Gandhi told him, "when I feel I must write. You are going too fast.

<sup>1</sup> This is the title given to Chapter 27 of Jawaharlal's autobiography.



You should have taken time to think and become acclimatised."<sup>2</sup>

In his autobiography Jawaharlal has noted how to some extent he resented Gandhiji's preoccupation with non-political issues and "could never understand the background of his thought". Propaganda regarding *Khadi*, valuable as it was, seemed to him a relatively minor activity in view of the developing political situation. He could not accept Gandhi's favourite concept of the poor being God's chosen people (*Daridranārāyan*) and of the rich treating their riches as trustees for the poor. When he tried to indicate some of these differences, Gandhi in a letter dated 17 January 1928 did not hesitate to hit back, reminding him of the old days when he had acquiesced in such ideas: "Whilst you were under stupefaction these things did not jar on you as they do now." "I see quite clearly," he added, "that you must carry on open warfare against me and my views. . . . The differences between you and me appear to be so vast and radical that there seems to be no meeting ground between us. I cannot conceal from you my grief that I should lose a comrade so valiant, so faithful, so able and so honest as you have always been; but in serving a cause comradeships have to be sacrificed." He hastened to add that there was to be no change in their personal relationship as "members of the same family", and no doubt, almost as in a quarrel between lovers, he knew he could count on the power of "stupefaction" which, for good and for ill, he could exercise on his disciple".<sup>3</sup>

It is necessary at this point to recall that in 1927, Indian political expectations had got a slap in the face by the appointment of the all-white Simon Commission which was to judge India's fitness for the next instalment of constitutional "reforms". Even the bourgeoisie felt that something had to be done if India's interests were not to be submerged and her self-respect obliterated. That something, however,

<sup>2</sup> Tendulkar, "Mahatma", Vol. II, P. 402; Nanda, *op. cit.*, Pp. 273-75; Brecher, *op. cit.*, Pp. 57-58.

<sup>3</sup> Tendulkar, "Mahatma", Vol. VIII, Pp. 350-51; "Autobiography", P. 192.



had to be different from what radical Indian groups were gravitating towards. This was the time when frustration after the failure of non-co-operation and the emergency of communal conflict, which the "divide and rule" policy of Government encouraged, had led to the recrudescence of terrorism, not only in its home province, Bengal, but in upper India where Bhagat Singh was to become a legend. Government, of course, had recourse to its wonted weapons of repression which was no better than legalised violence. More important was the awakening of masses of toilers to a new life of their own, to independent political aims, and to active struggle not only against imperialism but also against its junior, and often discontented partner, the Indian exploiter. In the mid-nineteen-twenties the industrial working class was emerging as an important factor, fighting for its rights and evolving its own leadership. For the first time also, the new ideology of the working class—Socialism—had begun to develop in India and penetrate to the radical and youthful section of the national movement. This was the period of the Kanpur Communist Conspiracy Case (1924) and the better known Meerut Conspiracy Case (1929), of the growth of the communist-inspired Workers' and Peasants' party, of the advance of militant trade unionism in Bombay, Calcutta and elsewhere, and of the phenomenal strike movement which marked the year 1928. Inevitably, this development threw its reflection on the national movement and Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose came into all-India prominence as leaders of the new left-wing in the Congress and of youth and radical movements.

Gandhi disliked these symptoms and wanted to put his foot down. At the Madras Congress (1927), however, as noted before, the sheaf of resolutions presented by Jawaharlal were accepted. It did not escape Jawaharlal that the situation was unreal and powerful Congress groups "could never think in terms of independence", dominion status representing their 'horizon's utter sum'. He accepted the Congress secretaryship at the request of its president, Dr. Ansari, and with



the new *élan* acquired abroad entered his tasks. In 1928 he presided over a number of provincial conferences, addressed countless meetings of radical youth, and was elected president of the All India Trade Union Congress. All his speeches were variations on the same theme, namely, the twin national objectives of independence and socialism. Since industrialization was an inevitable social phenomenon and capitalism and imperialism also, the two latter evils, which were intertwined, had to be eliminated, and the fight for freedom from Britain's yoke was to be on two closely allied fronts, political and economic. As for the Hindu-Muslim confrontation, he held strongly to a view which even his conservative father once supported in a letter to Dr. Ansari, stressing that communal unity could be achieved "only on an economic basis and in the course of the fight for freedom from the usurper."<sup>4</sup> He never gave Communism his "doctrinal adherence"; he had not yet worked out, and never really did, a coherent ideology of his own; but he spoke much of the language of Communism with Gandhian undertones which he had made peculiarly his own. And as he went from one end of India to the other, he rejoiced to see the people afire with great expectations.

In 1928 the Simon Commission came to India. The studied exclusion of Indians from the Commission had been an outrage even to a large body of moderate opinion. Everywhere black flag processions, the organized working class conspicuously participating, shouted at the Commission: "Simon, go back!" In Lahore, Lala Lajpat Rai, the venerable leader, died a few days after he was beaten up badly at the head of one of those demonstrations. It was now Jawaharlal's turn to have a taste of police blows, and in Lucknow he got it. He has left a revealing report of how he felt about it all: "I could not tolerate the idea of my behaving like a coward. Yet the line between cowardice and courage was a thin one. . . . It was a tremendous hammering. . . . I felt

<sup>4</sup> "A Bunch of Old Letters", Pp. 81-83.

half blinded with the blows, and sometimes a dull anger seized me, and a desire to hit out . . . but long training and discipline held, and I did not raise a hand, except to protect my face from a blow." Fortunately he was not injured in any vital spot, though he was badly enough bruised. A colleague, later to be famous, Govind Ballabh Pant, was in the same crowd, with his tall frame a much bigger target, and was so severely injured that for a long time he could not straighten his back or lead an active life. Jawaharlal got after this beating a Gandhi letter which has become celebrated: "My dear Jawaharlal, My love to you. It was all done bravely. You have braver things to do. May God spare you for many a long year to come and make you his closer instrument for freeing India from the yoke. Yours, Bapu."<sup>5</sup>

Politically, throughout 1928, what bulked large before the country was the Simon Commission boycott and the all-party effort to reply to Britain's *hauteur* by formulating a constitution for India. As a prominent Congressman holding important Congress offices, Jawaharlal found an audience for his ideas in regard to independence and socialism which whole-hogging socialists could not. He himself said that he was "by no means a pioneer in the socialist field in India", but it was he, largely, who put socialism, so to speak, on India's political map. Of course, the conditions were such, in that period when the world economic depression had begun to throw its shadow even on India and exacerbate class disharmonies, that the people were ready to listen to socialist ideas and programmes. Even the U.P. Congress Committee, when its president was Tasadduq Ahmad Khan Sherwani, himself a landowner and by no means a fire-brand, drew up in the late 'twenties and early thirties' what Jawaharlal called "a mild socialist programme". For the new-fangled propaganda of socialism the main vehicles, apart from the class organizations of workers and peasants, were the proliferating youth and student bodies and, particularly, the Independence

<sup>5</sup> "A Bunch of Old Letters", P. 68 ; "An autobiography", Pp. 177-81.



of India League, of which Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose were the two all-India stalwarts. This was, as long as it lasted, little more than a pressure group inside the Congress, and when the wave of civil disobedience started in 1930 petered out of existence. But for a while it was very near the centre of the political stage. A Nehru biographer, permitted access to secret intelligence reports, has quoted an official admission that by the end of 1928, "the younger and more ardent spirits" whom Jawaharlal led, appeared to have "completely swept away the more prudent counsels of the advocates of Dominion Status".\*

Who would preside over the Calcutta Congress (December 1928) where the issue of complete independence *versus* dominion status was to be thrashed out, was a crucial question. If the elder Nehru had a weakness, it was in respect of his son, and when his own name was suggested for the presidentship, he proposed that the honour should go to Vallabhbhai Patel, who had shot into all India fame after having led stolidly a limited but powerful *satyagraha* of peasants in Bardoli *taluka* of Gujarat, and failing him, to Jawaharlal. This is significant, for Motilal was seriously perturbed by his son's activities—not only on account of the repeated rumours regarding his probable arrest but also because of "the tension" between father and son, which was greater, on the son's testimony, than on "any previous or subsequent occasion". The all-parties Committee, headed by Motilal, had drafted a report, known as the Nehru Report, which had stipulated dominion status that was anathema to Jawaharlal. The father's pride and sense of practical politics was equally hurt by the son's goings-on, and possibly like Gandhi himself somewhat later, he wanted to tame Jawaharlal by putting him in the president's coveted chair. However, the consensus was that Motilal should preside, and he did, over a session, held with much fanfare, which was stormy

\* Brecher, *op. cit.*, P. 60; "An Autobiography", Pp. 182-84

and tractable at the same time, a portent of the unrest and the uncertainties typical of the period.<sup>7</sup>

At Calcutta, Gandhi came out of his self-chosen seclusion to plead before the Congress that the struggle for complete independence, for which so many were straining at the leash, should be postponed. "The fire of independence", he said, "is burning just as brightly in my breast as in the most fiery breast in this country, but ways and methods differ". Jawaharlal opposed him—"I have felt it incumbent to do so because of the very teaching I have learnt at his feet"—but then Gandhi mollified the opposition by agreeing to give Britain a year's time within which to offer dominion status, and a warning that after the period of grace was over a fight for independence would be launched. Even so, the compromise resolution was opposed in the open session, but Gandhi had his way, Subhas Bose's amendment being defeated by 1,350 to 973 votes. Both Jawaharlal and Subhas voted in the minority, though earlier, in the confusion that often overtook them, they had agreed to the compromise, and earned from Gandhi a severe reprimand. In the battle of wits, generally, Gandhi came out on top. This was seen even in small things. Fifty thousand workers had come in a procession and had taken possession of the pandal, and both Nehru and Bose, being sticklers for procedural propriety, tried their hardest to get them to leave the pandal, but it was the personality and friendly persuasion of Gandhi (and the elder Nehru) that made them leave after their demands were heard and assured consideration.

The year 1929 was the year of preparation, and there was an overwhelming desire that Gandhi himself should stand at the head of the Congress organization. Some wanted the honour to go to Vallābhāi Patel, known as a close Gandhi *protégé*, but Gandhi had other plans. This time he did not wait for Motilal to press his son's claims, which Motilal again did in words that are significant: "There are

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 185 ; Nanda, *op. cit.*, Pp. 298-312 ; "A Bunch of Old Letters", Pp. 59-62.



strong reasons for either you or Jawahar to wear the 'crown'; and if you and Jawahar stand together, as to which there is no doubt in my mind, it does not really matter who it is that stands in front and who behind". Without beating about the bush, Gandhi announced his nomination of Jawaharlal who "is undoubtedly an extremist thinking far ahead of his surroundings but he is humble and practical enough not to force the pace to the breaking point". Gandhi did, indeed, have to make a gesture towards youth and patriotic militancy which Jawaharlal represented, but throwing his mantle, as it were, on the younger and more highly strung successor, he sought to make sure that what he deemed impetuosity was restrained. Referring to steam "which becomes a mighty power only when it allows itself to be imprisoned in a strong little reservoir and produces tremendous motion", he added: "Even so, have the youth of the country of their free will to allow their inexhaustible energy to be imprisoned, controlled and set free in strictly measured and required qualities".<sup>8</sup> Thus Gandhi took the initiative to ensure that the left wing movement, with its face set towards socialism, was brought effectively within the framework of his leadership, and Jawaharlal, fretting not infrequently, found himself a prisoner of the master's charm and strategy.

Throughout 1929 there was tension in the atmosphere, more indeed than the lull before a storm, for individual terrorism had again raised its head and the labour movement surged almost headily forward. When thirty-two leading trade unionists, many of them Communists, were arrested and stowed away in Meerut jail, in order that the benefits of jury trial may not have to be conceded, Jawaharlal did not hesitate to call it "a blow against the whole working class" and moved into the task of organizing their defence, discovering in the process not only the rapacity of lawyers but also the querulous idiosyncrasies of many of the accused. Gandhi himself acted with great discretion in visiting the prisoners

<sup>8</sup> D. G. Tendulkar, "Mahatma", Vol. II, Pp. 489-90 ; Nanda, *op. cit.*, Pp. 312-13.



whose ideology differed drastically from his own. As the Congress session was approaching he made sure of his strategic move, namely the installation of Jawaharlal as Congress president. This he did in spite of ten provincial committees suggesting Gandhi's name, five Patel's and only three Jawaharlal's. The young man had appeared to be drifting towards the extreme left, and it was necessary to wean him away. A secret circular letter<sup>9</sup> of the Government of India had noted in February 1929 its fear that "the decision of future policy appears to be almost entirely with young men, notably Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Babu Subhas Chandra Bose. There is a tendency for *political and Communist revolutionaries* to join hands, and *Pandit Jawaharlal, an extreme nationalist, who is at the same time genuinely attracted by some of the Communist doctrines, stands almost at the meeting point.*" (Italics added). Gandhi must have argued to himself that Jawaharlal had to be placed formally at the head of the Congress, so that he could realize the necessity of keeping off extremist politics and supporting compromise moves that Gandhi always had in mind. "Those who know our relations", he said about Jawaharlal, "know that his being in the (presidential) chair is as good as my being in it". He had to placate his own entourage and also the Old Guard who were rather taken aback by the suggestion, and for this purpose he wrote an eulogy of Jawaharlal which, however it might sound in retrospect, did have a particular contemporary motivation which made it look like special pleading.

"In bravery", Gandhi wrote, "he (Jawaharlal) is not to be surpassed. Who can excel him in the love of the country? 'He is rash and impetuous', say some. This quality is an additional qualification at the present movement. And if he has the dash and the rashness of a warrior, he has also the prudence of a statesman. He is undoubtedly an extremist, <sup>9</sup>thinking far ahead of his surroundings. But he is humble

<sup>9</sup>Quoted in Nanda, *op. cit.*, P. 310.



enough and practical enough not to force the pace to the breaking point. He is pure as crystal, he is truthful beyond suspicion. He is a knight *sans peur et sans reproche*. The nation is safe in his hand".

It should be added that Jawaharlal, while surely mindful of the honour, too great indeed for anybody to spurn it lightly, felt "annoyed and humiliated" at the way the thing was done. "I did not come to it", he wrote, "by the main entrance or even a side entrance ; I appeared suddenly by a trap-door and bewildered the audience into acceptance. They put a brave face on it, and like a necessary pill, swallowed me. My pride was hurt, and almost I felt like handing back the honour".<sup>10</sup>

The Lahore session of the Congress (December 1929) was eagerly looked forward to, and the Left, though mystified by Gandhi's refusal of the presidentship, was not unhappy at Jawaharlal's selection. What Gandhi had in mind emerged, however, when in October 1929, two months before the Calcutta ultimatum was to expire, the Viceroy made a declaration on "the goal of Dominion Status" to be reached in some unspecified future, and in response, Gandhi, along with Mrs. Besant, the two Nehrus, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and some others, signed what is known as the "Delhi Manifesto" offering co-operation "to evolve a scheme for a Dominion constitution suitable to India's needs". Later, Jawaharlal was to record his judgement of this action as "wrong and dangerous" ; but he was, he admitted, "talked into signing", and then "calmed by a soothing letter from Gandhiji". It was really an amazing, and to the Left elements in India, an exasperating incident ; it happened in the context of the heroism of a Bhagat Singh and the self-immolation in jail of a Jatin Das. There was confusion and consternation in Congress ranks ; the unpredictability of Gandhi was clear once again, and also the pliability of Jawaharlal in Gandhi's hands, and on November 4, 1929, the *London Times* rejoiced:

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<sup>10</sup> "An Autobiography", Pp. 194-95 ; Brecher, *op. cit.*, Pp. 61-62.

"What last night's statement means is the scrapping of the programme on which Congress was to have met at Lahore".<sup>11</sup>

Luckily, the jubilant expectation of the *Times* was not quite fulfilled. Yet another meeting with the Viceroy, which Gandhi and the elder Nehru attended, could not reach agreement. Within a few weeks of each other, Jawaharlal presided over the All India Trade Union Congress at Nagpur and then the Congress at Lahore, hoping vainly as he discovered, to make the national movement "more socialistic, more proletarian" and to draw "organized labour" nearer the national movement. It seems as if a dichotomy in the nature of things and in the character of the personalities involved, prevented fulfilment of this hope.

At forty years of age, Jawaharlal, presiding over the Congress in succession to his father, "the symbol, even for a while, in the eyes and hearts of great numbers of people", appeared to be the rising star on the Indian scene, but the real repository of power in Congress was still the Mahatma. "I must frankly confess", the young president began, "that I am a socialist and a republican", and in a wide-ranging speech surveyed the world scene and the place that India should occupy in it. Though largely discursive, the speech had inspiring passages and some challenging formulations. He thought it necessary to oppose Gandhi's theory regarding the rich being trustees for the poor as "barren"—"the sole trusteeship that can be fair is the trusteeship of the nation". With the Mahatma in mind, no doubt, he averred: "Violence is bad, but slavery is worse". And perhaps with reminiscent regret he sent out a summons to action: "Success often comes to those who dare and act; it seldom goes to the timid who are ever afraid of the consequences".

In the Lahore session, the Nehru Report with its postulate of Dominion Status was reported to have lapsed and complete independence (*Poorna Swaraj*) adopted as the creed of the Congress. The All India Congress Committee was

<sup>11</sup> See Hiren Mukerjee, "Gandhiji", Pp. 84-85, and reference therein.



authorized, "whenever it deems fit, to launch upon a programme of Civil Disobedience, including non-payment of taxes". At midnight on December 31, as the new year was ushered in, the flag of Indian freedom (red, white and green—later, the red was substituted by saffron) was unfurled by Jawaharlal. On January 26, 1930, was celebrated all over India, the first Independence Day, when mighty crowds took the pledge, to be renewed every year, to struggle for complete independence, for it was "a crime against God and man to submit any longer" to British rule. Mystery still shrouded the definition of *Poorna Swaraj* and Gandhi's chosen strategy. But again, for many months, the movement surged, the spirit of the people was kindled, and it burnt, a brilliant flame.<sup>12</sup>

A forthright resolution that "a parallel government" should be set up and workers and peasants organized by local Congress committees to that end was defeated in the Lahore Congress. Subhas Chandra Bose who moved the resolution wrote later that there was no plan before the delegates, and "a more ridiculous state of affairs could not be imagined."<sup>13</sup> Bose formed a group of his own which Jawaharlal, in spite of his ideological sympathy, could not join. Meanwhile, as an impatient people waited, Gandhi bided his time. He even asked the Viceroy to concede "eleven points" which to his mind formed "the substance of *poorna swaraj*". Later, Jawaharlal wrote fretfully on this Gandhi habit: "What was the point of making a list of some political and social reforms—good in themselves, no doubt—when we were talking in terms of independence? Did Gandhiji mean the same thing when he used this term as we did, or did we speak a different language?" However, Gandhi alone would cast the die, and so the disciple could later reminiscently write: "We were vague about the future . . . we had burnt our boats and we could not go back, but the country ahead of us was an almost strange uncharted land". It was a strange approach, no doubt, to the second great phase of our national struggle for freedom.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Pp. 86-87; Brecher, *op. cit.*, Pp. 64-65.

<sup>13</sup> Subhas C. Bose, "The Indian Struggle", P. 200.



And it was the reason perhaps for the magnificent movement of our people in 1930-32 ending distressingly. As long as possible the people fought, even when virtually leaderless, and they fought with many weapons ; the stir in the air owed something, no doubt, to the Gandhian alchemy—for example, the initial choice of salt laws for defiance, which first "bewildered" Jawaharlal and then thrilled him with its uncanny enchantment for the mass mind. But the peculiar meanderings of applied Gandhism were found, after four strenuous years of hope and of despair, not to lead to within sight of the promised goal.

During this period Jawaharlal was in jail most of the time, emerging occasionally to give Gandhi a hand, in two minds as a rule, the master's magic relieving frequent bedevilment. In August 1930, when the movement was in spate and Government felt itself at bay, the Viceroy made an offer to the Congress for participation in the Round Table Conference in London. As his emissaries, Tej Bahadur Sapru and M. R. Jayakar saw Gandhi in Yervada jail, where the Nehrus, father and son, were brought from Naini Jail to join in the consultations. Nothing came of it ; as Jawaharlal knew, "there was not the faintest chance of any peace between the Congress and the Government as matters stood", and yet the idea of a settlement was, in the middle of the fray, given a lease of life. On March 4, 1931, the Gandhi-Irwin Agreement was signed, after month-long negotiations in which Gandhi and the Congress Working Committee members took part ; they had been especially released for the purpose while others remained behind bars. Hastily, a session of the Congress was convened, in Karachi, where the Agreement suspending Civil Disobedience was unanimously endorsed! Appropriately, it devolved on Jawaharlal to move the proposal for endorsement. He did so, he wrote later, after "great mental conflict and physical distress" ; he had to fight indeed a lot more than his accustomed qualms in giving way to Gandhi's desire. "Was it for this", he reflected, "that our people had behaved gallantly for a year?



Were all our brave words and deeds to end in this"? Trying frantically to justify himself to himself, he concluded that it would be "personal vanity" to express his dissent and braced himself to moving the resolution. Of course, he said, and he had to, that the truce meant a breathing space during which negotiations would be tried but preparations for the next round of struggle would also be made; besides, what weighed most with his audience, it was essential to have Gandhi continue as leader. "One thing is certain", said Jawaharlal at Karachi, "that we cannot afford to be here or there and do two things at the same time. For this I implore you to decide once for all. So far we have decided to abide by Gandhiji, and let us do so until we see the way blocked for further progress." The Agreement, Nehru said later, was "not popular"; one delegate is said to have remarked that if any one but Gandhi had been responsible for it, he would have been thrown into the sea near by. Even Subhas Chandra Bose, who did not share Jawaharlal's complexes in respect of Gandhi, contented himself with reading a Leftist manifesto. All this happened in spite of the fact that Congress had met in the shadow of national mourning, since Bhagat Singh and some of his comrades, hauled up on charges of terrorism, were executed even as the Congress was proceeding and in utter disregard of the country's united demand for reprieve.

To placate, perhaps, the injured left wing, the Karachi Congress, at Jawaharlal's initiative, adopted a resolution on Fundamental Rights and a National Economic Programme. It was progressive, and while by no means socialist, included a basic democratic charter of a fairly advanced type, nationalization of key industries and transport, labour rights and agrarian reform. K. M. Munshi, then in Congress and now a *Swatantra* party leader, discussing it tauntingly says: "It shocked the bourgeoisie, but did not placate the ardent Marxists". Gandhi, he says further, approved of the draft after some hesitation, since "it was the pet child of the impetuous Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru". That it was "a sop



to me" has been strongly denied by Jawaharlal ; between him and Gandhi there was a relation which precluded, he said, "the methods of the market place". But perhaps it will not be wrong to conclude that Gandhi's object in blessing the resolution was to rehabilitate the Congress' prestige with the masses and use the additional popular support as a bargaining counter in negotiations with Britain on which he had set his heart.<sup>14</sup>

In his autobiography, Jawaharlal noted that disillusionment with struggle, which Karachi, somewhat though not quite<sup>15</sup> like Chauri Chaura (1924) spread among the people, led to the recrudescence of communal conflicts. In a place like Kanpur they took a heavy toll, including one pre-eminently courageous life, that of his comrade Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi. But he never unequivocally drew a lesson from such happenings. He could not also see, for quasi-Gandhian eye-glasses blurred his vision, that while struggle was in cold storage, petty but poisonous communal claims naturally took the field. This happened to the most humiliating detriment of India's image in the British-sponsored Round Table Conference where Gandhi became a prisoner in spirit. He did not realize the link between the offensive of imperialism, renewed shamelessly as Gandhi returned home empty-handed, and the suspension of struggle which the Congress leaders had pathetically hoped might cause a change of heart in their rulers. There was to be no "drawn battle" this time, the British Secretary of State, Sir Samuel Hoare, now said, putting aside the sanctimonious cloak he had worn at the Round Table Conference. An official spokesman in India intimated that "war is not fought with gloves on". Repression intensified, and of course Jawaharlal, after his father's death in 1931 lonelier than ever, was again stowed away in prison.

Month after month dragged on, while the Congress, at Gandhi's bidding, disengaged itself from the mass civil dis-

<sup>14</sup>Mukerjee, *op. cit.*, Pp. 94-96 ; "An Autobiography", Pp. 266-67.



obedience movement and turned towards the old "constructive programme". In September 1932, Gandhi suddenly embarked in jail on a "fast unto death" in order that the depressed classes did not have separate electorates which would necessarily stress their isolation from the rest of Hindu society. It ended well, for the British Government accepted Gandhi's way and he broke the fast, but while in many ways the fast, by a kind of mysterious communion, brought an edifying atmosphere and gave a heavy blow to the dastardly social practice of "untouchability" it came also as an unpleasant jolt to many. "What a capacity he (Gandhi) had to give shocks to people", Jawaharlal ruminated in jail. "... I felt annoyed with him for choosing a side issue for his final sacrifice. What would be the result on our freedom movement? ... After so much sacrifice and brave endeavour, was our movement to tail off into something insignificant? I felt angry with him at his religious and sentimental approach to a political question, and his frequent references to God in connection with it. He even seemed to suggest that God had indicated the very date of the Fast. What a terrible example to set! ... so I thought and thought, while confusion reigned in my head, with anger and helplessness, and love for him who was cause of this upheaval. ... And then a strange thing happened to me, I had quite an emotional crisis, and at the end of it I felt calmer, and the future seemed not so dark. Bapu had a curious knack of doing the right thing at the psychological moment, and it might be that his action—impossible to justify as it was from my point of view—would lead to great results, not only in the narrow field in which it was confined, but in the wider aspects of our national struggle. ..."<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps the only comment called for is that this appears rather like religious seizure and a relapse into faith of which Jawaharlal, as a Cambridge student, heard E. S. Montagu give a definition: "to believe in something which your



reason tells you cannot be true, for if your reason approved of it there could be no question of blind faith".<sup>16</sup> It was in the spirit of this faith that on the conclusion of this 1932 Fast, he wired to Gandhi: "How can I presume to advise a magician?"

The *reductio ad absurdum* of Gandhian practice in this period, embellished as it was by purificatory and other unspecified kinds of fasts, was reached in May 1934 when the All India Congress Committee, now deemed toothless, was allowed by the Government to meet at Patna and decided to call off civil disobedience altogether, except for a proviso, which seems to have been face-saving, that Gandhi alone, if and when he thought fit, could offer civil resistance. Inevitably, in the atmosphere of dismay, Congressmen's thoughts turned towards parliamentarism, and with Gandhi's blessing a new Swaraj party, so to speak, was set up to contest pending elections to the Central Assembly. It was too much, then, for Jawaharlal to bear. The news reached him in jail "with such a stab of pain, I felt the chords of allegiance that had bound me to him (Gandhi) for many years had snapped". In a beautiful and bitter letter to Gandhi he unburdened his agony: "And so the flag of freedom was entrusted with all pomp and circumstance to those who had actually hauled it down at the height of our national struggle at the bidding of the enemy; to those who had proclaimed from the house-tops that they had given up politics—for politics were unsafe then—but who emerged with a jump to the front ranks when politics became safe. And what of the ideals they set forth before them? A pitiful hotch-potch, avoiding real issues, toning down, as far as they dared, even the political objective of the Congress, expressing a tender solicitude for every vested interest, bowing down to many a declared enemy of freedom, but showing great truculence and courage in facing the advanced and fighting elements in the Congress ranks". Gandhi sought, as usual, to soothe him and perhaps, also as

<sup>16</sup> "An Autobiography", P. 21.



usual, he succeeded. "I understand your deep sorrow", Gandhi told him, but was confident that "a closer study of the written word will show you that there is not enough reason for all the grief and disappointment you have felt".<sup>17</sup>

It does appear that Gandhi's "chosen heir" was, like Gandhi himself, also a paradox, though of a very different sort. Jawaharlal did not hesitate to write at one point in his autobiography: "Can anything be greater coercion than the psychic coercion of Gandhiji which reduces many of his intimate followers and colleagues to a state of mental pulp?"<sup>18</sup> This was a state which he sincerely abhorred; anything that was limp and vapid roused his disgust. Courage he admired, and change and movement so that minds could range free and the spirit be undismayed. But again and again, the spell of Gandhi would throw him into at least a temporary stupor, which with his sense of loyalty to the cause and to his colleagues (Gandhi being supreme among them and almost synonymous with the cause) he would justify to himself by recalling the wonder that Gandhi was. No doubt there were things about Gandhi that make us wonder, but to find refuge and solace in such thoughts is indication of spiritual sloth which, in certain objective conditions, can be understood and even excused but it can hardly be esteemed.

In action Jawaharlal rejoiced and his thought was often luminous. But there was a strain in him which made him doubting, hesitant, irresolute. Perhaps he hesitated as he thought of the heavy price, a price in suffering, that basic social change almost inevitably entailed. He was not chary of paying the price himself, but maybe he thought of the sorrows that would come in the train of revolutionary action, sorrows that he frantically hoped our long-suffering people should be enabled to escape. It was, he knew with his intellect, a vain hope, but he carried it in his heart always,—it was an ache which the makers of history might spurn, but it helped to make the whole wide world his kin.

<sup>17</sup> Tendulkar, *op. cit.*, P. 319; cf. chapters in J. Nehru's "Autobiography", entitled "Desolation" and "Paradoxes".

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 539.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE WORLD'S KIN

In December 1936, Rabindranath Tagore hailed Jawaharlal as "a soldier whose banner is the banner of the exploited, and a patriot whose humanity and vision are not obstructed by the barriers of his land and its past". Jawaharlal had offered India, Tagore added, "two priceless gifts, a right to live bravely and a right to think intelligently".<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it may be said that from 1932 or thereabouts there was a decade or so, which was perhaps the most radiant phase of Jawaharlal's life. This was the time when he saw with clarity and explained with charm to the millions of his people, with whom he had identified his fate, that India's struggle was, even if we did not know it, part of the great struggle going on all over the world for the emancipation of the oppressed—"an economic struggle, essentially, with hunger and want as its driving forces, although it puts on nationalist and other dresses". And, in "Whither India"? (1933-34), a series of articles on 'what do we want and why', he stressed "the great goal of social and economic equality, to the ending of all exploitation of nation by nation and class by class, to national freedom within the framework of an international co-operative socialist world federation".<sup>2</sup> Here, as in Jawaharlal's great speech as president of the Congress at Lucknow (1936), one sees in his make-up an entirely effortless combination of an ardent world-view with his constant and beautiful devotion to his own land.

In prison, during 1932-33, he had concentrated, with an astonishing energy and self-control, on reading and writing, and even from behind bars his mind turned to the world crisis typified by the great depression which had continued



to plague the economy, the apparent decadence of the Western democracies and the repulsive and menacing advance of fascism on a global scale. He took pains, after he was free, to state that he was not a Communist "in the accepted sense of the word", but added, categorically: "I do believe that fundamentally the choice before the world today is between some form of Communism and some form of Fascism, and I am all for the former, that is, Communism . . . . There is no middle road . . . and I choose the Communist ideal. In regard to the methods and approach to this ideal . . . . I think that these methods will have to adapt themselves to changing conditions and may vary in different countries".<sup>3</sup> It can easily be guessed that between Gandhi and Nehru, who held many earnest talks and exchanged a great deal of correspondence, the difference in basic social outlook and to some extent also in regard to the means of social change now came into the open, though they agreed as to ultimate objectives and their personal relations remained entirely unimpaired. However, Nehru's emergence as the hero of his people had a difference in quality from previously and lent its aura to the period.

Early in 1934 Nehru went to Calcutta, partly for his wife's medical treatment, also because Bengal had suffered grievously under repression, and "really it was to be a gesture in the nature of tribute to her people". Naturally, he spoke at public meetings, "from a full heart", and the Government of India which had in a secret circular described him as "by far the most dangerous element at large"<sup>4</sup> in the country, ordered his prosecution. Years later, Jawaharlal recalled how his wife Kamala, who had had to be perforce somewhat stoical about these separations, possibly had premonitions about her ailment, and bidding him goodbye, collapsed in his arms.<sup>5</sup> He went off to his ten-by-nine-foot cell in prison, to begin again a routine by now well practised—long days and nights.

<sup>3</sup> Quotations in Brecher, *op. cit.* Pp. 79-80; also "Nehru on Socialism", Pp. 48-49. This statement was made to the press on Dec. 18, 1933.

<sup>4</sup> Brecher, *op. cit.* Pp. 82-83.

<sup>5</sup> Nehru, "The Discovery of India", P. 29.



of restraint, the loneliness, and the ceaseless quest of the 'right path' if one could find it in politics. What a trial it must have been to an acutely sensitive soul, and how superbly he soared above it, for it was during this term of his incarceration, with depression deepening as his wife's health rapidly declined, that he wrote, in eight months and entirely in prison, the autobiography which is one of the great and truly beautiful books of its kind in literature.

During an eleven-day reprieve, granted him on account of his wife's condition having gravely deteriorated, he found time, for he thought it urgent, to write to Gandhi at length about the 'state of the nation'. Referring to the withdrawal by Gandhi of civil disobedience (for reasons, as given, which seemed to Nehru "astounding") he wrote: "I had a sudden and intense feeling that something broke inside me, a bond that I had valued greatly had snapped". He added, in words of such beauty that one is tempted to quote extensively:

"I have always felt a little lonely, almost from childhood up . . . . that loneliness never went, but it was lessened. But now I felt absolutely alone, left high and dry on a desert island.

" . . . . Setbacks and temporary defeats are common enough in all great struggles. They grieve but one recovers soon enough. . . . But what I saw was not setback and defeat but spiritual defeat which is the most terrible of all. Do not imagine that I am referring to the Council entry question. I do not attach vital importance to it. Under certain circumstances I can even imagine entering a legislature myself. But whether I function inside or outside the legislature I function as a revolutionary, meaning thereby a person working for fundamental and revolutionary changes, political and social, for I am convinced that no other changes can bring peace or satisfaction to India and the world.

" . . . The resolution of the Working Committee on the subject (of socialism) showed such an astounding ignorance of the elements of socialism that it was painful to read it and to realize that it might be read outside India. It seemed



that the overmastering desire of the Committee was somehow to assure various vested interests even at the risk of talking nonsense.

" . . . . I have felt sometimes that in the modern world, and perhaps in the ancient world also, it is oft preferred to break some people's hearts rather than touch others' pockets. Pockets are indeed more valuable and more cherished than hearts and brains and bodies and human justice and dignity".

Gandhi gave a characteristic reply. "I understand your deep sorrow", he wrote, "you are quite right to give full and free expression to your feelings". But, he added, "I am the same as when you knew me in 1917 and after . . . I want complete independence for the country in the full English meaning of the word . . . But I fancy I have the knack for knowing the need of the time. And the resolutions are a response thereto. Of course here comes in the difference of our emphasis on the method or the means . . . I have looked up the dictionary meaning of socialism. It takes me no further . . . What will you have me to read to know its full content?"<sup>6</sup>

With whatever satisfaction (or lack of it) which Gandhi's letter gave, Jawaharlal went back to prison, to live again, as he wrote to his daughter, "the life of a vegetable", adding, however, that "rest is good for the body and quiet is good for the mind, it makes one think." Meanwhile, Kamala grew worse, and was sent to Europe for special treatment. As her condition became critical, the Government, watchful of Indian feeling, thought it wise to release Jawaharlal who rushed to her bedside abroad. There was pathos and a certain beauty, as if of an idyll that was delayed and doomed, in the story of the next few months till the end came on 28 February 1936, and in a while "that fair body and that lovely face, which used to smile so often and so well, were reduced to ashes." Returning home, full of the

thoughts of Kamala and of the days gone by, Jawaharlal cabled to his publishers in London that his autobiography, which she had not lived to see, was to be dedicated "to Kamala who is no more".

He came back, his face "lined with sorrow," as his younger sister noted, and his expressive eyes holding "a world of agony", to an India stirring again in anger and impatience at the British scheme of imposing on us the Government of India Act of 1935. Even the liberal publicist and politician, C. Y. Chintamani, at whom Jawaharlal had a few gentle digs in his autobiography, said of the Act: "If there is an Indian who can enthuse over this scheme of reforms, I confess I am not he, and if I should find him I will not envy him". A leading British authority on constitutional law, Professor Berriedale Keith, even gave his view that "the alleged concession of responsibility" was "all but meaningless".<sup>a</sup> In this context of things, patriotic desperation still found occasional expression in the misguided, but courageous, thirty-year-old movement of terrorism. More important, everywhere in India, even in the medieval bastions of the Indian States, our common folk, the worker and the peasant, were beginning to rise to their full stature, their "hearts now more capacious", in Milton's majestic language, and their "thoughts more erected to the search and expectation of the greatest and exactest things".

Jawaharlal was elected to preside over the Lucknow Congress, hardly a month after his bereavement. Gandhi wanted him for the office, not only as a token of sympathy for the loss of Kamala, but because he was anxious, by his own methods, to prevent him drifting too far to the Left. Jawaharlal, now rather more than ordinarily feared by the Old Guard of the Congress leadership, had not allowed himself to be associated with the recently formed Congress Socialist Party, but to Gandhi he was the socialists' "undoubted leader". And as in 1928-29, he formed the plan of

<sup>a</sup> C. Y. Chintamani, "Indian Politics since the Mutiny", Pp. 174-75, 180.



making sure that the "inexhaustible energy" of India's youth, powerfully attracted towards socialism, was "imprisoned, controlled and set free in strictly measured and required quantities". If Jawaharlal's impulses could be mollified, the socialist wave could, so to speak, be "imprisoned in a strong little reservoir" of Gandhi's own making. Formally in "retirement" from the Congress, Gandhi at the time was indeed very active, prodigal of advice to his numerous clientele, nursing his own cadre of "constructive" workers ready to be thrown any time at his bidding into satyagraha. There seemed to have been an "admirable arrangement" through which it might appear that he was "opposed as much to the parliamentarians as to the socialists, and that his was a genuine programme of mass militant struggle, though the form of that struggle was different from those of the communists and socialists". It was Gandhi's strategy which required that Jawaharlal should not even appear to be on the wrong side of him.<sup>9</sup>

It was for Jawaharlal a not unfamiliar predicament. But while he could not, even if he wanted to, overcome the conservatives in the Congress he could at least give expression to his go-ahead views, and this he did, magnificently, in his Lucknow address. He spoke of the mounting struggle all over the world against the gangrenous advance of fascism and sent on behalf of India a noble message of accord with that struggle. It was the period when, fed and fostered by imperialism, Mussolini and Hitler were strangulating freedom in Europe and Africa, and Japan, sweeping vulture-like on China, was aided and abetted by the sanctimonious champions of "democracy". Nehru, indeed, was India's organ-voice, condemning this multiplex reaction and stressing the link-up of our struggle for freedom with the global fight against fascism and its friends. His detestation of the vulgarity and vice that was fascism could be seen earlier when he was returning from Europe, and in spite of the utterest

<sup>9</sup> cf. Mukerjee, "Gandhiji", Pp. 108-11; E.M.S. Namboodiripad, "The Mahatma and the 'Ism'", P. 107.



importunity and clever manoeuvres to play upon his instincts of politeness, he refused even to see Mussolini for a very short while, lest the meeting be construed as some kind of recognition of fascism as something with which one could at least even formally associate.<sup>10</sup> Nearer home, he called for intimate communion between the Congress on one hand and worker-peasant organizations on the other and a special effort to win the heart of the Muslim masses who were developing unpleasant symptoms of distrust of and estrangement from the Congress. Speaking of the Soviets and their "monumental and impressive record", he gave his view that there had been "no such practical application of the democratic principle in history", and in spite of serious disagreement with much of Soviet policy he looked upon "that great and fascinating unfolding of a new order and a new civilization as the most promising feature of our dismal age".<sup>11</sup>

Nehru did not hesitate to aver that when he spoke of socialism as "the only key to the solution of the world's problems and of India's problems", he used that word "not in a vague, humanitarian way, but in the scientific, economic sense". It was to him not merely an economic doctrine; "it is a vital creed which I hold with all my head and heart". He did not wish, however, "to force the issue in the Congress and thereby create difficulties in the way of our struggle for independence." Here, possibly, was his Achilles heel, the root of his frequent vacillations—an artificial demarcation, which his head and heart could not accept but which he allowed himself to be persuaded to think expedient, between the national struggle and social issues. However, it was wonderful to see him soar far beyond the claptrap of politics and place his ideas, with passionate sincerity and an incomparable literary grace, on a truly principled and popular plank. And he was practically the one top leader in the Congress who was conscious of, and welcomed, the emergence in the middle 'thirties of the independent political role of the toiling masses.

<sup>10</sup> "The Discovery of India", Pp. 33-35.

<sup>11</sup> Mukerjee, *op. cit.* P. 112, and quotations therein.



In comparison, Subhas Chandra Bose, the other top man professing socialism, did not have Nehru's ideological clarity and grasp of world issues, and was even drawn towards certain meretricious features of fascism.

It was open to Nehru, as president, to constitute the Congress Working Committee with a majority of those who supported his line, but sensing the volume of opposition to it he thought such a course would be "improper" and took in ten members from the right wing and only four from the left. A close friend and colleague, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, wrote to him of his dismay at the reactionary character of the new committee: "It may be my vision is narrow. I rely more on the number of heads than on ideological discourses."<sup>12</sup> Nehru's sense of fairness and propriety did not, it was soon plain, win over the hardening opposition, and by June-July 1936 the clash came, as seven members of the Working Committee, led by Rajendra Prasad, Vallabhbhai Patel and C. Rajagopalachariar, sent in their resignation. "There is no loyalty of the spirit which binds our group together", Nehru told Gandhi in a letter (July 5) which showed how hurt he had felt. He said he had found "a bubbling vitality wherever I have gone" and surprising response to his speeches while he had been told that "the country was demoralized and hence we had to go slow". About his conservative colleagues' attitude he wrote: "However tenderly the fact may be stated, it amounts to this: that I am an intolerable nuisance and the very qualities I possess—a measure of ability, energy, earnestness, some personality which has a vague appeal—became dangerous for they are harnessed to a wrong chariot." He offered to resign himself, but Gandhi, as usual, effected a reconciliation, first by suggesting to Nehru that he should "allow (his) humour to play upon the meetings of the Working Committee" and then by reminding him: "If they are guilty of intolerance, you have more than your share of it. The country should not be made to suffer for your mutual in-

tolerance". In another letter Gandhi called the quarrel "a tragi-comedy", and added that the right-wingers had "chafed under your rebukes and magisterial manner and above all your arrogation of what has appeared to them your infallibility and superior knowledge. They feel that you have treated them with scant courtesy and never defended them from socialists' ridicule and even misrepresentation."<sup>13</sup> It seems Jawaharlal had inherited something of his father's inability to suffer certain people gladly, but he had realized that he had to try and put on the Gandhian strait-jacket rather more often than his father ever did.

Jawaharlal's ever generous impulses found also a more basic justification for his action in the outbreak at this time of the Civil War in Spain. "I saw this", he said, "developing into a European or even a world conflict . . . Was I going to weaken our organization and create an internal crisis by resigning just when it was essential for us to pull together?"<sup>14</sup> Besides, the elections to the provincial legislatures were pending, and with Gandhi's backing Nehru had secured approval for a mildly Leftist manifesto calling for substantial agrarian reforms and amelioration of rural indebtedness. Meanwhile, the next plenary session of the Congress at Faizpur was due, and again, by a master-stroke, Gandhi dissuaded a somewhat unwilling and repeatedly balked Vallabhbhai Patel from contesting Jawaharlal's re-election, though the Sardar insisted he should tell the country that he did not endorse Nehru's views. It was Jawaharlal's mass appeal—'charisma' in the making—of which Gandhi was intent on the fullest utilization.

Nehru's election campaign (1936-37) has been described by a biographer as "a fury of activity", when "like an arrow he shot through the country", travelling by every vehicle or on foot or astride horse or elephant or camel, addressing more than ten million and showing his face to many more eagerly awaiting millions, enjoying "the sense of communion with

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Pp. 182-98 ; cf. also "Gandhi Marg", *op. cit.* Pp. 234-36.

<sup>14</sup> Quotation in Brecher, *op. cit.*, P. 92.



large masses of people", and acquiring, "in only slightly less measure than Gandhi, a capacity to feel the pulse of the Indian masses."<sup>15</sup> It was as if through this exacting ordeal, enthusiastically undergone, he reached out to his place, which nothing could shake, in the heart of his people.

Meanwhile, thanks mainly to the astuteness of Gandhi, the Congress organization generally remained in the grip of seasoned conservatives like Sardar Patel, while the popularity of Nehru safeguarded the political capital which Congress needed in order that it could be drawn upon during legislative elections and in case of struggle (on non-Nehru lines) which might become unavoidable against the Government of India Act of 1935 which even the upper layers of Indian society could not quite stomach. Jawaharlal's suggestion at Lucknow regarding the collective affiliation to Congress of workers' and peasants' organizations had been defeated. His exhortations on contact with the masses, particularly the Muslim masses who were being drawn away by communal influences, had been disregarded. His passionate pleadings against office acceptance under the new Constitution, which he first made at Lucknow and repeated at Faizpur, were to be vain. And for a while, it appears, Gandhi made a serious effort to soak up the trickle of socialism with the sponge of satyagraha. Claiming to be more of a socialist and a communist than its proponents were, he would advise Narendra Dev, first chairman of Congress Socialists, to "hasten slowly," and always to consult Jawaharlal. He would make a pointed show of his concern for basic Socialism: "I suggest your presenting the country", he wrote, 'with practical socialism in keeping with Indian conditions instead of scientific socialism as your programme has been called'.<sup>16</sup> While Nehru, both at the Lucknow (1936) and Faizpur (1937) sessions of the Congress, had advanced the point of view that preparation should be made for a mass struggle in order to make possible the convocation

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 93.

<sup>16</sup> Tendulkar, "Mahatma", Vol. III, P. 344.



of a real Constituent Assembly, the majority threw it out. When nine out of the eleven British Indian provinces had Congress ministries, the people naturally came to have heightened expectations which were often balked, as *lathi* charges and even occasional firings took place. Nehru was keen on civil liberty and himself directly promoted an all India movement on that basis, but Gandhi thought it better to warn against "licence" and would say provocatively: "Civil liberty is not criminal liberty". In retirement ostensibly, Gandhi was taking one step after another to have his own way in Indian politics, to combat the people's growing militancy which warmed Nehru's heart and to check and divert the trend towards socialist and communist ideas and activities.

The Mahatma, casting as he could his spell upon Jawaharlal, had indeed done his job so well that in spite of growing discontent with the dominant Congress leadership the barque of leftwing consolidation, which might once have ridden the tide towards fortune, was bound before long in shallows and in miseries. It was with Gandhi's blessing that Subhas Chandra Bose was elected president of the Haripura (1938) session of the Congress. Bose's presidential address lacked Nehru's ideological clarity but was unequivocally go-ahead and practical. Even Bose, who had been often a stormy petrel and did not have quite the Nehru kind of link with Gandhi, tried for a time to fall in with the right wing leaders like Patel who controlled the Congress ministries; neither he nor Nehru could call to order the Bombay ministry when working class strikers faced police firing. But differences of a more acute type began to crop up. Diverting the people's attention from major national issues Gandhi would go on a fast in a small native state like Rajkot and wait upon Chief Justice Gwyer for an award in a manner which went against the grain of radicalism. He would openly declare his readiness for a compromise when it was necessary to concentrate on the fight against the federal part of the constitution, which was entirely unacceptable, and to secure the convoca-



tion of a democratically elected constituent assembly. Thus fortified by the Mahatma's doings, the right wing was getting ready to cease pampering the left which it had so long done under duress. The chief Congress leaders, with Gandhi's support, decided that on the expiry of Bose's term of office he should not, as he wanted to, be reelected, but that Pattabhi Sitaramayya, who could be relied upon as a yes-man of the Right, should be president. Unhappily, by reason of Gandhi being behind it, Nehru could not resist this decision. He tried to justify himself to himself by telling Subhas later that he should not have wished for re-election when it was causing division in Congress ranks and that he was a big enough man in Indian politics without being Congress president for successive terms. It is a pity, to put it modestly, that at this juncture of Indian politics Nehru and Bose could not persuade themselves to pull together, with the result that neither was or could be happy and the country's cause suffered greatly.

Meanwhile, Nehru had again been abroad for a few hectic months, widening India's mental horizon and deepening his own sensibilities regarding the international scene. He had news of Hitler's Nazi hordes marching into Austria, when he was having one of his rare holidays in the U.P. hills. "I heard the tramp of barbarian feet", he said, "over the pleasant gardens of Vienna . . . There was no peace for me then, even in Khali, no escape". Reaching Europe, he hurried first to Barcelona, Spain's hero-city, spending his time in the front lines on the city's outskirts, meeting the International Brigade which stood fast against the fascists' overwhelming assaults. Few things moved him so much as the dreadful destruction by concerted reactionary forces of the Spanish Republic; whatever faith he had in the West and its vaunted democracy was nearly depleted, if not dead. He was acutely aware of the perfidious pro-fascist role of Britain and France: "history long ages hence will remember this infamy and will not forgive them".<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Brecher, *op. cit.*, P. 98-99.



Just as Mussolini in March 1936 had importuned him for an interview, the Nazi government two years later invited him to visit Germany, indicating earnestly that they knew of his opposition to fascism but wished him to come, and that he could go "as their guest or privately, in my own name or incognito, as I desired." Again, as in the case of fascist Italy, he declined the invitation and went instead to Czechoslovakia which England's then prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, had called a "far-away country" which his country could not be much concerned with, little knowing that Hitler's cat-and-mouse play with it would switch on the world's most devastating war. Much of his time abroad, Jawaharlal was in London and in Paris, addressing meetings on the gathering storm in India and even more urgently on the Fascist threat to Europe and the world and the utter immorality and ultimate stupidity of appeasement. "My mind", he wrote later, "was full of the war that was coming. I thought of it and spoke of it and wrote about it, and prepared myself mentally for it. I wanted India to take an eager and active part in the mighty conflict, for I felt that high principles would be at stake, and out of this conflict would come great and revolutionary changes in India and the world."<sup>18</sup>

In November 1938, Nehru returned home, to find himself embroiled in what must have seemed to him a petty tumult, for his mind was full of the new vistas that had crowded in on him abroad. But it was serious enough, perhaps even the gravest in Congress history. By 1580 to 1375 votes, Subhas Chandra Bose had defeated Gandhi's nominee—"the defeat is more mine than Pattabhi Sitaramayya's", so said the Mahatma in a statement sombre with ill-concealed anger. It was one of the extremely few occasions when the great man, so cool and collected in his dignity, seemed small and peevish. At the Tripuri Congress session itself, where Bose presided in spite of high fever, incidents happened, at the instance, no doubt, of the votaries

<sup>18</sup> "The Discovery of India", Pp. 4-5; J. Nehru, "China, Spain & the War", Pp. 98, 100, 149.



of non-violence, over which it is better that a veil is drawn. When Jawaharlal, told about the incidents, said he was unaware of them and could hardly believe such things, Subhas Chandra's brother Sarat, also a Working Committee member, angrily wrote: "As you yourself say, you can function individually without a group or even a second person to support you. You can turn your back on the kind of politics for which you have no stomach and believe it to be non-existent. Not everybody is so fortunate . . ." Sarat further insinuated: "You, with your temperament and training, must find it difficult to think ill of the set with which you have cast yourself".<sup>19</sup> It appears that while Jawaharlal, lonelier even than usual on this occasion, tried frantically to keep himself above what he thought a footling little battle, the right wing leadership showed malice and sharp cunning. In the open session of the Congress, an extraordinary resolution was passed, which directed Bose to constitute his working committee "in accordance with the wishes" of Gandhi. But when Gandhi was approached he replied he could give no names for that would be an act of "imposition". Then twelve members, that is eighty per cent of the committee that Bose formed, put in their resignation, with words that are significant: "We feel that the time has come when the country should have a clear-cut policy not based upon compromise between different incompatible groups of the Congress. It is but right, therefore, that you should select a homogeneous cabinet." That letter seems to confirm the correctness of Bose's earlier assertion that there was, over the question of working the federal scheme, a prospect of a right wing compromise with Britain, for otherwise the reference to "incompatible groups" is hard to explain. Perhaps this also accounts for the fact that Nehru did not sign the letter of the twelve; he denied, of course, repeatedly the existence of any such rightist move, as far as he was concerned, but the fact that he put in his resignation separately was not

<sup>19</sup> "A Bunch of Old Letters, Pp. 358-67.

without meaning. Even about a year earlier, he had told Gandhi how he feared that leading Congress elements were "adapting themselves far too much to the old order and trying to justify it" and were "sinking to the level of ordinary politicians who have no principles to stand by and whose work is governed by a day-to-day opportunism".<sup>20</sup>

Over the Tripuri crisis, indeed, Nehru floundered and found himself unhappy and isolated, unable to cross the wishes of Gandhi but by no means reconciled to the position, endeavouring till the very end that Gandhi agreed to "accept Subhas as the president". Gandhi, however, was determined to push him out, which Jawaharlal described "an exceedingly wrong step". This failure of an effort to heal the breach, which was due largely to indecision and peculiar scruples and a sort of fixation about Gandhi's incontestable indispensability, remains a major blemish on Jawaharlal's record. It is painful to recall how the texture of Indian history might conceivably have been different and perhaps brighter, if certain risks could be taken at this juncture and Left forces, with Jawaharlal and Subhas leading them together, could be in good heart and fighting array. But Jawaharlal remained sullen and aloof, convinced that unity could be built only around Gandhi as the pivot and at the same time unenthused about such conviction. He was reported to have felt, even after the lapse of some twentyfive years, that on balance he had done the right thing at the time.<sup>21</sup> It is difficult, however, to agree with this view of the matter.

No more than a reference can be made here to the very revealing and spirited correspondence in this period between Nehru and Bose, extraordinarily lengthy epistles running into many printed pages, which could be the subject matter of a whole book if an analysis of the two leaders' psychology and of the then situation was attempted. In their criticism of each other, politically and personally, both wrote with refresh-



ing candour and pulled no punches. In itself a rewarding study, the correspondence, when its context is remembered, leaves however a dismal impression. Apart from the immediate issues in debate, other significant things came out in the correspondence. "Personally, I have always had, and still have, regard and affection for you", Nehru wrote, "though I sometimes did not like at all what you did or how you did it. To some extent, I suppose we are temperamentally different and our approach to life and its problems is not the same." One finds Subhas saying with the peculiar touchiness which characterises many in the part of India, Bengal, where he belonged and was acclaimed most as a hero: "You take up enthusiastically every possible point against me; what could be said in my favour you ignore." More impersonally, he made a valid point that Jawaharlal could hardly make up his mind in a crisis and would appear "as if you are riding two horses". And he had a dig at Jawaharlal's "pious platitudes and frothy sentiments" regarding foreign affairs, stressed that "foreign policy is a realistic affair to be determined largely from the point of view of a nation's self-interest", and chided him for "championing lost causes all the time" and for "condemning countries like Germany and Italy on the one hand and on the other, giving a certificate of good conduct to British and French imperialism". This latter allegation was most unfair, but Subhas was a single-minded nationalist to whom, at that time, a certain sneaking admiration for fascism with its appearance of total, if often brutalizing, discipline had a certain appeal. He was more plausible when he asserted: "Either we should take international politics seriously and utilize the international situation to our benefit—or not talk about it at all. It is no use making a show if we do not mean business." This was important, for Subhas was reiterating that since a world crisis was brewing, India should give an ultimatum to Britain and launch a struggle, not worrying overmuch about such things as the advance of fascism.

For one who was known for his quickness of temper,



Jawaharlal wrote back with gentle dignity, only very rarely flaring up to say that Bose was difficult to work with and was disinclined to frank discussion with Gandhi, and that as Congress president he should not have given credence to "press rumours" and tendentious gossip. "To my misfortune", he wrote, "I am affected by international happenings more than I should be." And more pointedly: "The association of vague Leftist slogans with no clear Leftist ideology or principles has in recent years been much in evidence in Europe. It has led to Fascist development and a straying away of large sections of the public. The possibility of such a thing happening in India possessed my mind and disturbed me. The fact that in international affairs you held different views from mine and did not wholly approve our condemnation of Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy added to my discomfort, and looking at the picture as a whole, I did not at all fancy the direction in which apparently you wanted us to go." Regarding India's internal situation, he was "not prepared to do anything to split the Congress", and was convinced that "struggle, without Gandhiji's active participation and leadership, was not likely to be an effective one".<sup>22</sup>

The Mahatma apart, Nehru and Bose were the two tallest leaders of the Indian people. It is a pity that their great gifts, disparate but of pre-eminent quality, could not be co-ordinated into service to the nation. Jawaharlal had insight and a delicate and sophisticated sensitivity, something of an artist who in the then Indian conditions found himself inevitably in the company of politicians, endowed with a capacity of unremitting labour for impersonal causes, a lover not of India alone but of the world, ready and able to read the lineaments of an entire epoch and to grapple with the picture. Heavier in build of body and mind, Subhas had an excess of natural ardour, was uniquely capable of courage and sacrifice, drawn towards ideology but with the practical man's impatience of it, zealous of what may be called the military virtues which he thought would hasten achievement of his

\* <sup>22</sup> "A Bunch of Old Letters", Pp.



one over-mastering and exclusive desire, the freedom of India. Jawaharlal could rouse deep affection, as Subhas could rouse intense loyalty—between them both, a phenomenon which has from time to time illumined our recent history. It was grievous that the twain never really met. Gandhi did not want them to, and of the other likely leaders, no one, not even Maulana Azad, had either the public stature or the fibre in themselves to see what India needed and to act accordingly.

Meanwhile, Bose was forced out of Congress presidency (April-May 1939), and then committed what was perhaps a mistake in forming his own party, the Forward Bloc, which gave an excuse to his tormentors for disqualifying him for any Congress office for three years. Instead of launching the struggle which he had been tom-tomming vehemently, Bose conducted, under provocation no doubt, a vendetta against right-wing leaders which won him much applause but soon recoiled on him; the Congress had long been enthroned in people's hearts and wordy fireworks, without a tangible programme of action, made no more than a fleeting impression. So, with Jawaharlal fretting uneasily in the company of right-wing leaders and Bose unable to give concrete shape to his Leftism, the country sulked and sorrowed, and lacked a dynamic leadership when World War II broke out in September 1939.

It should be remembered to Jawaharlal's credit that while he could not see eye to eye with Subhas, he thought it fit to remain out of the Congress Working Committee when the latter was forced to resign, and did not rejoin it till after the Ramgarh Congress (1940) over which Maulana Azad presided. He found some solace in the visit he made to China in answer to an invitation to the Congress from Nationalist China, soon after his return from a tour of Ceylon (1939), just as he had earlier (1937) toured Burma and Malaya. He could spend only twelve days in China, mostly in Chungking, the war-time capital which was then being battered by Japanese-fascist bombs, for the war intervened and he had to rush



back home. He saw, as he noted in his speeches and writings, that through anguish and incessant travail a new China was growing, strong and united, incalculable in its potentialities of the future.

For some time before September 1939, the "prologue arm'd" to World War II had become plain. "We sit on the edge of a sword", wrote Nehru, "balancing precariously and waiting for the succession of events." The Congress at its Haripura session (1938) had declared that India would take no part in Britain's imperialist war and would resist the employment of India's man power and resources. On September 3, the war broke out, and almost immediately afterwards India was declared a belligerent state without the least consultation with the country's leadership. Between the Congress and the British Viceroy protracted interchanges regarding war aims and their application to India went on, while the masses surged ahead on their own, as in the one-day political strike against war by 90,000 Bombay workers on October 2. It was not till September 1940 that the Congress, under Gandhi's lead, made a tangible if ineffective gesture of defiance in the form of symbolic satyagraha by individuals after giving prior notice to the authorities and quietly courting arrest with anti-war slogans. Vinoba Bhave, later to be celebrated for his *Bhoodan* (land-gift) movement, was chosen by Gandhi to be the first satyagrahi, while Jawaharlal followed him as the second volunteer and was sentenced to four years' imprisonment. A confidential British account of the consequences of this savage sentence indicates something of Nehru's role and the state of the country "The immediate and local effect was good ; it put an end to the sort of agrarian discontent that Nehru had been endeavouring to stir up. . . . On the other hand, it gave a handle to those, both in India and also in England and the U.S.A. who desired to accuse Government of repression and vindictiveness. . . . It therefore caused some embarrassment in dealing with the less important people who followed in Nehru's footsteps".<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Quotation in Brecher, *op. cit.*, P. 107.



In 1939-40, the formulation by the hunted and illegal Communist Party of the "proletarian path" of mass struggle against imperialist war was the only positive lead before the country, but it was small in number and its voice hardly reached to the ends of the land. Subhas Bose was arrested in 1940, then allowed in early 1941, on account of illness, to stay in his home under police surveillance, which on the eve of Independence Day he evaded (January 26) and by a series of spectacular adventures escaped out of India, never again to return but to fight from abroad for Indian freedom with the help of Britain's foes. Gandhi wrote in a spirited letter to the Viceroy (September 30, 1940) of "the double autocracy that rules India", and planned a non-violent revolution with his own characteristic meanderings of thought which even his Congress colleagues found difficult to follow. Jawaharlal could not strike out on a path of his own; between his devotion to the cause of Indian freedom and his anxious concern about the advance of fascism he was obviously in great mental stress; the repeated and total rejection of offers by the Congress of cooperation on honourable terms and the promise of freedom after the war was over gave recurrent shocks to India and deepened the depression. "I had looked forward", Jawaharlal wrote, "to friendly relations. Now (1940) I felt that unless England changed completely there was no common path for us. We must follow different ways."<sup>24</sup>

• In December 1941, Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad and other leaders were released in view of Pearl Harbour and the changing war situation. On December 8, Nehru told a press conference in Lucknow: "I think that in the grouping that exists, there is no doubt that progressive forces of the world are aligned with the group represented by Russia, China, America and England". The British debacle in Burma had brought matters to a crisis. In February 1942, Marshal and Madame Chiang Kai-shek

<sup>24</sup> "The Discovery of India", P. 448.

came to India, met and talked for hours with Gandhi, Nehru, Azad and other leaders and appealed to England and India to make up politically and jointly prosecute the war. Maulana Azad has left it on record that the Chinese leaders' attitude of extraordinary friendship for Jawaharlal was "thoroughly disliked by the Government of India".<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, in January 1942 the All India Congress Committee made another offer of conditional cooperation. It was at this meeting that, denying current reports of a fundamental rupture between Nehru and himself over non-violence and other issues, Gandhi publicly designated him as his successor: ". . . I have said for some years and say now that not Rajaji (Rajagopalachariar) but Jawaharlal will be my successor. He says he does not understand my language, and that he speaks a language foreign to me. . . I know this, but when I am gone he will speak my language."<sup>26</sup>

When Rangoon fell to the Japanese and Calcutta appeared to be in danger, the British Government sent Sir Stafford Cripps to Delhi with plans to break the political deadlock. The United States took a hand in the effort and President Roosevelt's personal envoy, Col. Johnson met Government and Congress leaders in order to "iron out the differences". Cripps had been certified to Gandhi by Nehru himself as a genuine radical ; he was already known for his sympathies with India. Besides, as a fruitarian, even more than the vegetarian a rare breed anywhere, he had easier entry into Gandhi's heart. Cripps' plan, however, was one which could be all things to all people ; it showed a different face to the Congress, to the Muslim League which was demanding Partition, to the Princes who wanted to stick to their so-called "treaty rights", and generally and perilously to racial and religious minorities whom Britain would guarantee "justice"! It was a plan not so much to quit India as to divide her people and continue Britain's domination.

<sup>25</sup> Abul Kalam Azad, "India Wins Freedom" (1955), P. 45.

<sup>26</sup> Brecher, *op. cit.*, P. 108 ; Tendulkar, Vol. V, *op. cit.*, P. 52.



Maulana Azad, whose testimony is valuable, has left it on record that Jawaharlal, "deeply troubled" by world developments and anxious to help bring about the defeat of malignant fascism, was even "inclined to consider the (Cripps) proposals favourably".<sup>21</sup> Cripps also was trying his best to play upon his strong anti-fascist views. However, Nehru agreed with Gandhi that the British were just not ready to accede to India's minimum demands and that the Cripps offer, as Gandhi put it, was only "a post-dated cheque on a failing bank". He was "surprised", he wrote, at Cripps' "woodenness and insensitiveness, in spite of his public smiles" and his "take it or leave it attitude."<sup>22</sup> Jawaharlal, like other Indian leaders, had only seen that Churchill, constrained to send Cripps as emissary, must have felt himself in a tight corner, but he hardly realized that ways and means for manoeuvre and escape from a critical situation were still open to the imperialist—as Lenin put it, "there is always a way out" for the ruling class in a crisis unless the people manage to seal it up.

Towards the end of April 1942, the All India Congress Committee met at Allahabad and adopted a resolution which, based on Gandhi's draft, was probably composed by Nehru and gives an idea of the way his mind was working. "The Congress", it said, "repudiates the idea that freedom can come through interference or invasion by any foreign nation, whatever the pretensions of that nation may be. In case an invasion takes place it must be resisted." At a press conference on April 12, Jawaharlal spoke even of organizing independent resistance to the Japanese—"it may be", he said, "we would have to take up guerrilla warfare" which would be "our own war effort on the basis of a free and independent India". Gandhi mildly disapproved the idea of guerrilla fighting—"it will be a nine days' wonder; it is foreign to the Indian soil"—and insisted on non-violent non-co-operation which, at the A.I.C.C. Nehru,

<sup>21</sup> "India Wins Freedom," Pp. 50, 64-65.

<sup>22</sup> Unpublished letter quoted in Brecher, *op. cit.* Pp. 109-10.



almost distracted by his dilemma, also agreed to. A new note of urgency and of passion was then to be seen in Gandhi's utterances. "I have decided", he said in late May, "that even at certain risks, which are obviously involved, I must ask the people to resist the slavery."

Azad in his memoirs has given some idea of the torment in Jawaharlal's mind, for he was, he said, "always more moved by international considerations than most Indians". When the fangs of fascism threatened freedom everywhere, large-scale mass action needed very careful thought indeed. "Some of us", wrote Nehru, "were disturbed and upset, for action was futile unless it was effective action, and any such effective action must necessarily come in the way of war effort at a time when India herself stood in peril of invasion. Gandhi's general approach also seemed to ignore important international considerations and appeared to be based on a narrow view of nationalism. . . . But his fundamental attitude remained his objection to passive submission to British autocratic and repressive policy in India and his intense desire to do something to challenge this". And Jawaharlal himself began to feel that "in India it was better to convert the sullen passivity of the people into a spirit of non-submission and resistance". He knew there was danger, which the imminent likelihood of invasion increased, that the war effort might be hindered, but "oddly enough, it was that very danger that had brought this crisis in our minds, for we could not remain idle spectators of it and see our country mismanaged and ruined by people whom we considered incompetent and wholly incapable of shouldering the burden of a people's resistance which the occasion demanded."

When all the pent-up passion of our people sought some outlet and the imperialist bureaucracy remain egregiously inept, Jawaharlal, never unaware of the risks involved, felt there was no other way out but the "short and swift" struggle which the master with his message to Britain, "Quit India", and to Indians, "Do or Die", now promised. "It was better", he said, "to jump into the uncharted seas of



action and do something rather than be the tame objects of a malign fate. It was not a politician's approach but that of a people desperate and reckless of consequences."<sup>29</sup>

In a letter to the Viceroy, Gandhi described Nehru's dilemma in the summer of 1942. "I have argued with him", he wrote, "for days together. He fought against my position with a passion which I have no words to describe. . . He yielded when he saw clearly that without the freedom of India that of the other two (China and Russia) were in great jeopardy".<sup>30</sup> It was the emotional response and reasoned reaction of one who was the world's kin to the strident call of his country's freedom and dignity.

<sup>29</sup> Tendulkar, *op. cit.* Pp. 113-14 ; Nehru, "The Discovery of India", Pp. 480-85.

<sup>30</sup> Tendulkar, *op. cit.* Pp. 191-208 ; Brecher, *op. cit.* P. 111.

## CHAPTER VII

### AS FREEDOM CAME

Early on August 9, 1942, even before the light of dawn, the British-Indian police forces, with the military standing by, swooped down on thousands of homes all over the country and whisked away to prison large members of patriots who, the Government feared, were pledged to the slogan of "Do or die" and, as the "Quit India" resolution of the day before had put it, "the starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale". Jawaharlal, Maulana Azad and other members of the Congress Working Committee, as well as of course Mahatma Gandhi, were arrested in Bombay—they knew it was coming, but engaged as they were in an open conspiracy they never even thought of evading arrest—and were taken, somewhat stealthily, to Poona, where Gandhi was detained in an old mansion of the Aga Khan's, and the other top leaders were taken to Ahmadnagar Fort, an ancient Mughal structure situated somewhat out of the way in Bombay province. The arrests put the spark to the fire that burnt for a few brave months in India, the "August Revolution," as it is often called, which showed the grandeur of our people's spirit and also its weaknesses. Till June 1945, however, Jawaharlal was to remain in captivity, his last (except for a short and exciting tenure in a Kashmir jail) and longest stay behind bars.

A sympathetic and not insensitive biographer<sup>1</sup> has called it "a mild imprisonment on the whole", since the accommodation was adequate, and the distinguished prisoners were given a private kitchen worked by convict warderers. Perhaps if Osswiecim and Buchenwald were

<sup>1</sup> Brecher, *op-cit.*, P. 115.



yard sticks of comparison, the imprisonment was mild, and in any case none of the prisoners squealed about it. But it is fair to remember the nature of the confinement and the spiritual duress involved. For three weeks no news of the outside world was allowed to filter through. "There were no contacts of any kind, no interviews, no letters, no newspapers, no radio." Even the presence of the prisoners was a state secret unknown to all but the officials in charge, "a poor secret for all India knew where they were". Later, newspapers containing heavily censored news were allowed, and still later, letters of a purely domestic nature from near relatives. But there were to be no interviews and no other contacts. It was as if by an ironic quirk of fate Nehru and people like him with their clear-cut anti-fascist convictions were to be in prison while "many of those who used to bow to Hitler and Mussolini, and approve of Japanese aggression in China, should hold aloft the banner of freedom and democracy and anti-fascism."<sup>2</sup> The overwhelming majority of the thousands of arrested patriots were kept of course in infinitely worse conditions than prevailed in Ahmadnagar fort and similar special places of detention. It was no surprise when among the best-known prisoners, some died in jail, like Gandhi's wife, Kasturba, whose loving constancy to an often impossible husband was itself a feat of character, and Mahadev Desai, his talented Secreatry. And outside jail, of course, there were shootings and worse as the people's massive anger sometimes rose high and sent its breath to the stars that twinkled over this ancient land.

As in his earlier jail tenancies, Nehru was a "model prisoner", methodical in his daily routine, with a cheerful vitality which relieved the gloom of monotonous minutes being slowly ladled out, nursing his sick comrades, doing his favourite chores like gardening and star-gazing and discussing various subjects with verve and understanding. It was

<sup>2</sup> "The Discovery of India", Pp. 1-5; cf. "India Wins Freedom", P. 92 where with calm dignity Maulana Azad records that Government did not, while it easily could, let him see his dying wife. Both his wife and his sister died when he was in jail.

not till the summer of 1945 that he was released, but in his book of life it was not a chapter of "those barren leaves", for from out of this stay in prison there emerged the final volume of his trilogy, "The Discovery of India", not as pure and aesthetically satisfying as the autobiography, not particularly profound or scholarly either, but in parts positively sparkling and altogether remarkable for a glowing quest of his own roots touching the soil of his country.

Released in 1945, Jawaharlal found his people still acutely in the throes of discontent though often veneered over by an appearance of resignation. Man's criminality and an alien administration's crass rascality had brought about, in 1943, in the fair and fertile province of Bengal the most hideous famine of the century. As Jawaharlal wrote about it, "here death had no purpose, no logic, no necessity; it was the result of man's incompetence and callousness, man-made, a slow creeping thing of horror with nothing to redeem it." In a way it was the terrible symbol of India's muted agony, the *cul-de-sac* to which the heroic, if often blind and undirected, "August revolution" appeared to have led. By the end of 1944, however, the end of the war in Europe was in sight, but in east and south-east Asia a long war with Japan was anticipated, with India necessarily as the main base of British and allied operations. A political settlement was therefore desirable, and all members of the Congress Working Committee were released so that they could attend a conference in Simla to discuss an offer of communal parity in a new and entirely Indian executive council led by the British Viceroy and the Commander-in-chief.

Nehru was a much sought-after celebrity during his few days in Simla, popular as always with the crowds that got together, often seen on horse-back, sprightly and smiling, in the hill town's steep pathways. But his role at the conference was not particularly important. Negotiations failed in the meeting, as perhaps the British, subtly encouraging the



intransigence of the Muslim League, wanted them to fail, on the communal issue dividing Indian political groups. From Simla, Nehru went to Kashmir for a much needed holiday, drinking in the beauty of the lovely vale and "the intoxication of it", perhaps seeking in its "magic" some balm for a spirit that was never still. There was more than enough reason for that spirit to be deeply disturbed, and he must have felt acutely what he had written some years ago about India being communally "in a dark age".<sup>3</sup>

It can hardly be said that Jawaharlal had, in political terms, made an earnest effort hitherto towards the achievement of what Gandhi used to call "heart-unity" among the two major communities of India. He was, of course, intensely interested in such unity, which, as a civilized Indian, well aware of the composite character of Indian culture, he wished to be able to take for granted. And for a while he must have felt rather impatient (and also perhaps a trifle superior) in regard to the fantastic irrationality of communal differences distorting even such supreme objectives as the country's freedom from foreign rule. In 1926-27, for instance, he wrote to a friend about "communal frenzy" which was "awful to contemplate", chided our people for having turned "extraordinarily dogmatic and little-minded", and said: "I have no patience left with the legitimate and illegitimate off-spring of religion."<sup>4</sup>

Like his father, Jawaharlal was distinguished by an innate and shining secularism; no one in politics, not even Gandhi, was so trusted and loved by Muslims in India. He knew also, more than most others, the basic remedy of the communal disease—as he wrote once; "The Congress has at least largely kept out of this communal darkness, but its outlook is petty *bourgeois*, and the remedy it seeks for this as for other problems is in terms of the petty *bourgeoisie*. It

<sup>3</sup> "We have to deal not with Communism but, with the addition of an extra syllable, with communalism. And communally India is in a dark age"; cf. "An Autobiography". P. 593.

<sup>4</sup> Unpublished correspondence with Syed Mahmud. Quoted in Brecher, *op. cit.*, P. 50.



is not likely to succeed that way."<sup>4</sup> But, as seen in earlier chapters, he shrank, with his own kind of fastidiousness and under Gandhi's beatific spell, from such concretely and consistently envisaged mass action as could, at certain risks no doubt, have washed off the poisonous communal perversions which from time to time debilitated our national struggle. And he did not have the stomach for hard-headed political pourparlers which might, by conceding somewhat to practical difficulties and personal vanities, achieve working compromises which, while far short of an ideal position, could at least ward off the cunning strokes of the far-famed imperialist strategy of Divide and Rule. Only if this is kept in mind can one understand the unhappy course of events which led Jawaharlal, anguished but resolute, to acquiescence in the dreadful cost that Britain exacted before the transfer of power—the cost, still incalculable, of partition of India and all its concomitant miseries.

He was young and not in a position to turn the tide when C. R. Das brought up before the Coconada Congress (1923) the "Bengal Pact" which had, on the basis of generous advantages offered to Muslims, united Hindus and Muslims under his leadership inside and outside the legislature of those days. It was not ratified, mainly on account of abstract arguments against separate electorates and reservation of seats and jobs. Lala Lajpat Rai and M.A. Ansari, both respected leaders, were instead called upon to draw up an All India Pact, which was never done—and it was almost known beforehand would never be done—because of their sharp differences of opinion. While the trend towards communalism was very noticeable among important Muslim leaders of the 1920-23 period, Jawaharlal knew well of a similar trend among very important Hindu leaders also. On December 2, 1926, his father wrote him a revealing letter where he spoke scathingly about the mischievous communal propoganda against him during election time "under the

<sup>4</sup> "An Autobiography", P. 593.



auspices of the Malaviya-Lala gang", and added in tired tones: "I shall consult Gandhiji but as you know his hobbies do not interest me beyond a certain point."<sup>6</sup> During the period of the nearly unanimous boycott of the Simon Commission, the preparation of the Motilal Nehru Report and the All-Party Conference in Calcutta on the eve of the Congress session of 1928, there came wonderful opportunities for a permanent political rapprochement between Hindus and Muslims, a better and stronger version of the 1916 Lucknow Pact (to which Jawaharlal had been a witness), but by a crude combination of legal sophistry and political short-sightedness the chance was lost.

It seems difficult to realize today the crudity of the thing, for the country is used now to infinitely worse attitudes, but it is necessary to put the record straight. Before the Congress met in Calcutta, an all-parties convention took place where Jinnah, later to be the implacable proponent of Pakistan, declared his own preference for joint electorates but proposed four amendments embodying the ten demands of the Muslims of India. These related to 33½ per cent. representation in the Central Legislature, reservation of seats on the basis of population in Bengal and Punjab, the claim, that is to say, of a statutory majority, the separation of Sind and the vesting of residuary powers, not in the Centre as recommended by the Motilal Nehru Committee but in the provinces. "Separate electorates", Jinnah hopefully asserted, "will probably go sooner than most of us think", but strangely enough the gulf between Muslim and Hindu, by no means wide, was not bridged.

Jawaharlal must have seen Muslim estrangement growing worse and little, if anything, being done to stop it. At a Calcutta meeting in 1928, Maulana Muhammad Ali, criticising the Nehru committee's recommendation regarding

<sup>6</sup> "A Bunch of Old Letters", Pp. 49-51; cf. Motilal's suspicion, just before the Gauhati Congress (Dec. 1926) that Lajpat Rai and Malaviya, "aided by Birla's money" were trying to capture the Congress: Nanda, *op. cit.*, P. 269.

Dominion Status, said: "You make compromises in your constitution every day with false doctrines, immoral conceptions and wrong ideas, but you make no compromise with our communalists with separate electorates and reserved seats. Twentyfive per cent is the proportion of our population, and yet you will not give us thirtythree per cent in the Assembly. You are a Jew, a *Bania*." In 1929 Jinnah formulated on behalf of the Muslim League the famous "Fourteen Points", some of them perhaps irritating but not, as one sees them in retrospect, particularly malevolent, but they were rejected out of hand. Congress leaders thought at that time, disastrously as later events have shown, that the demands came from people "more famous than representative" and could be ignored with impunity. This was a cardinal error and its shadow lengthened. The poison entered the soul, and a situation developed where communalism could be deplored but hardly on any side avoided. In the Round Table Conference which Gandhi attended in London (1931), an impasse developed over the Muslim list of "safeguards", and the sad story of 1928 was repeated, and in a setting that humiliated even more our patriotic pride. Maulana Azad had pithily observed: "The Muslims were fools to ask for safeguards, and the Hindus were greater fools to refuse them." This double folly was advertised in St. James's Palace, while Gandhi sat and shared the ignominy. A foolish contest over the externals of power, yet to be achieved jointly by all, put the halter securely round the necks of Hindu and Muslim alike. The British Government, posing as the virtuous and unwilling arbiter, pressed home the advantage by decreeing the Communal Award which the Congress, in its predicament, could neither accept nor reject!

The new stir in the 'thirties, when our people rushed "once more into the breach" and stormed the citadels of imperialism, tended naturally to bring Hindus and Muslims together, but the great movement, as earlier indicated, had a sorry end, and the rot revived. Imperialist machinations did of course have its goodly share of responsibility, but



that can by no means be held forth as absolution of ours.

Over a month, in 1935, Rajendra Prasad, as Congress president, held "heart to heart talks" with Jinnah; they "liked each other", and as good as reached an agreement, but Jinnah insisted that Pandit Malaviya also should agree, which happy event, on account mainly of pressure from Bengal Hindus and Punjab Sikhs, did not happen. It was at this point of time that, egged on doubtless by imperialists, Jinnah began to insist that the Muslim League should be recognized as the only representative organization of the Muslims while the Congress should reconcile itself to being regarded as spokesman only of the Hindus. It was a fantastic claim, and in the 1937 elections the Muslim League's poor performance at the polls showed up Jinnah's fallacy. But it was a mistake, thoughtlessly perpetrated, when after the elections Nehru, impatient with Jinnah's tactics, said sharply that in the country there were two parties, the Congress and the Government, and that the others must simply "line up". It offended even neutral Muslim opinion, for the League, though yet negligible organizationally, was thriving already on the growing Muslim alienation from the Congress. Nehru should also have known that in the 1937 elections the Congress generally shied away from Muslim electorates, except in the North-West Frontier province where the Red Shirts led by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan befriended the Congress. The position was further aggravated when the Congress repulsed, again rather short-sightedly, proposals for forming ministries where possible in conjunction with the League. In the U.P., a most crucial province, a Congress-League ministry could have come into the picture in 1937, if Chaudhuri Khaliquzzaman, a former Congress leader, and Nawab Ismail Khan could join as League representatives in a Cabinet of nine members. Maulana Azad, who cannot be accused of bias against Nehru, has regretfully recorded that Jawaharlal's impulsive insistence that the League could have only one, and no more than one, seat in the Cabinet was "most unfortunate", for it gave the

League a new lease of life and of hostility to the Congress and enabled Jinnah, now on the war-path, to take full advantage of the situation.<sup>7</sup>

It was thus in a worsening atmosphere that Nehru, as Congress president, met Jinnah in 1938. The latter reiterated his "Fourteen Points", and added some more like the demand for withdrawal of Congress opposition to the Communal Award, changing the Tricolour flag and giving up the *Vande Mataram* anthem. A committee set up by the Congress recommended deletion of certain portions of the song as likely to offend Muslim religious susceptibilities, but it pleased neither the League nor many Hindus in the Congress, of course for exactly contrary reasons. From Gandhi in this period came a somewhat diverting statement about a "blank cheque" he was ready to sign and give to Jinnah.<sup>8</sup> On *Swadeshi* paper, with *Swadeshi* pen and ink, it was said picturesquely, the blank cheque would be signed. It did not elicit a smile from Jinnah who was, on the contrary, piqued; he said he did not care for a "blank cheque" but for his "fourteen points." Such exchanges would never have been possible if the country had better things to do, but it was a time when the Left wing was being out-manoeuvred, and in the prevailing gloom communal reaction reared its ugly head. Even so, Muslim communalism had to wear a radical robe, and the League session of 1937, like the Congress session of 1929, declared the goal of India to be "full independence in the form of a federation of free democratic states"; it adopted, also on the analogy of the Congress's Karachi declaration (1931), an "economic, social and educational programme." Unless the League stole something of the Congress's thunder, it could not rope in the Muslim masses. Along with Gandhi and his colleagues, Jawaharlal did not see the writing on the wall; it may be that criticism should be withheld, for it is easy to be wise after the event, but

<sup>7</sup> "India Wins Freedom", Pp. 160-62, also Pp. 20-21; for the last few paragraphs, also cf. Mukerjee, *op. cit.* Pp. 73-76, 97-100, 122-125.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Pp. 125-26.



surely politicians of a certain calibre should have some powers of prevision. They could not imagine that the cup of communal disharmony was not full to the brim yet ; they had no idea that the Pakistan resolution would come in 1940 and grip the Muslim mind. A dynamic movement of the people, based on their own life's interests, was the sovereign remedy for communal aberrations, but neither Gandhi nor even Jawaharlal saw it clearly and the people whom they led became "as fuel of the fire".

During the early phases of World War II, the communal question, which was indeed the weak spot of the Congress, worsened so that most Muslims were no longer ready to give it their allegiance. This happened, as W. Cantwell Smith remarked, "for the very simple and very adequate reason that it was not offering them anything in which they were interested". In the absence of a real movement, when all objectives except "non-industrial cloth making" and the preaching of pacifism had been pretty well given up, when even individual satyagraha, tardily launched, was called off "in recognition apparently of its ridiculousness", the Congress was found wanting, and communalism as a mode of thinking and feeling advanced rapidly and among all sections.<sup>9</sup> Jawaharlal must have sensed this happening but could not, in the intervals of his jail-going, do anything tangible about it.

Unavoidably, also, when the Congress after the "Quit India" struggle was outlawed for nearly three years, its finest cadres imprisoned, its funds seized and its organization virtually broken, the Muslim League flourished in the peculiar political vacuum, and by appealing to the freemasonry of the faith and playing upon real and imaginary Muslim fears and suspicions built a mass party. Even its irrationality and studied hate-campaigns helped, for mass neurosis is a dangerous thing as the experience of fascism in many countries has so grievously illustrated. In March 1940, at Lahore, the

<sup>9</sup> Tendulkar, "Mahatma", Vol. V P. 6 ; W. C. Smith, "Modern Islam in India", Pp. 251-53.

Muslim League adopted the Pakistan resolution, countering Congress nationalism with the Muslim demand for the partition of India, and Jinnah placed great stress on the two-nation theory even as he said he stood "unequivocally for the freedom of India", since the Muslim masses would not lend him their ear otherwise. But there was a tendency for the Congress leadership to pooh-pooh the notion and thereby exacerbate the new-fangled demand. In April 1941, at the Madras session of the League, Jinnah made effective use of a remark of Rajendra Prasad that the Congress had never discussed the Pakistan scheme because it had never been formally referred to it by the League. Prasad had actually written a book on the subject, and Jinnah exploded: "Do you believe that the Working Committee of the Congress never discussed the scheme? This ghost has been haunting them since 1940. What standard of truth is this?"<sup>10</sup> Quite obviously, tempers were frayed, not a happy prolegomena to understanding, and for this grave default, Gandhi and Nehru must bear their share, necessarily a large share, of responsibility. While the Congress sharply demarcated itself from such bodies as the Hindu Mahasabha whose leader, V. D. Savarkar, spoke openly of India as "the abode of the Hindu nation", it was a pity that Gandhi permitted a leading Congressman, K. M. Munshi, to resign and start his *Akhand Hindustan* movement. It was a pity also that the influence of Gandhi and Nehru was allowed to be exerted some time earlier in regard to the participation by important Congress leaders, including even such orthodox Muslims as Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, in the ceremonial opening in Varanasi of a somewhat doubtfully secular *Bharatmata Mandir* (Temple of Mother India). On the temple's walls are engraved the alphabets of all Indian languages, but Urdu, which is entirely Indian, and particularly cherished by Muslims, is omitted because its script derives from abroad!

<sup>10</sup> B. R. Ambedkar, "The Partition of India", P. 268; M. Noman, "Muslim India", P. 427; "Recent Speeches & Writings of Mr. Jinnah", ed. J. Ahmed (1942), Pp. 149-51, 218, 251.



Nehru's freedom from communal prejudice had always been transparent; there never was or could be any question about it. His deep concern for the rights and the dignity of every Muslim as a national of India equal to any other was reportedly ridiculed once by Sardar Patel with the remark: "There is only one genuinely nationalist Muslim in India—Jawaharlal."<sup>11</sup> But, as Azad wrote as a candid friend, Jawaharlal often acted "on impulse", sometimes made up his mind on "theoretic" grounds without taking all relevant facts into consideration, and would not easily, if at all, change it. One should, in fairness, remember that while Jinnah was the kind of person who hardly lends himself to sympathetic study he developed the fatal fixation about Partition late in life when certain unpleasant conclusions coagulated in his mind and made a permanent habitation. In his correspondence there seems to be a certain coldness which nearly freezes, but in late 1939 Jawaharlal's charm made him almost thaw and write pleasantly. Even so, Jawaharlal had himself developed a fixation about Jinnah to such an extent that he threw away opportunities, though they might have seemed remote, of an approach at least to an understanding. He spoke repeatedly of insuperable "psychological barriers", wondering even "what purpose will be served by our discussing with each other"—all in spite of reports from a mutual friend about Jinnah's having something like a soft corner for him! One is almost reminded of Motilal in early 1930, telling Ansari about Jinnah's grievance of a cold reception: "What Mr. Jinnah said on the occasion left me cold and I could not work up an artificial warmth to please him."<sup>12</sup> In a peculiarly complex concatenation of ideas, events and circumstances, personalities have a role that cannot be wished away, and the personal equation in certain contexts does happen to count for a great deal. It is a pity that Jawaharlal, not unmindful of his own personality and

<sup>11</sup> cf. Brecher, *op. cit.*, P. 120.

<sup>12</sup> Nanda, *op. cit.*, P. 292; see also "A Bunch of Old Letters", Pp. 270-72, 388-94, 403-10.



its many and complicated pulls, was insensible of analogous, if dissimilar, intricacies in the case of people of whom he disapproved. At any rate, it has to be recorded in the interest of historical accuracy that in his letter to Jinnah (October 18, 1939), he was not just being modest when he wrote: "... I am ashamed of myself, in so far as I have not been able to contribute anything substantial to the solution in a friendly way (of the Hindu-Muslim problem). . . . My own mind moves on a different plane and most of my interests lie in other directions. And so, though I have given much thought to the problem and understand most of its implications, I feel as if I was an outsider, and alien in spirit".<sup>18</sup>

More than his other colleagues, Nehru knew that with the League as an auxiliary, Britain pursued the policy of advertising to the world that she was willing to transfer power but Indian disagreement prevented it. More than others, he knew that Hindu-Muslim differences could well have been overshadowed and even eliminated in joint, popular struggles for which in 1945-46 the whole country was yearning. Over and over again, our common people had furnished evidence of their pluck, courage and intrepidity, their detestation of foreign rule and its symbols, their latent powers of impromptu organization and mobility. If they were capable of so much without, as in 1942, organized leadership, what could have been their showing when a movement was properly prepared and conducted? The Congress leadership, however, well aware of Britain's "divide and rule" strategy, yet pinned its hopes on British goodwill, and not only shied away from, but positively discouraged, the massive manifestations of our people's discontent. In November 1945 there took place, especially in Calcutta, stupendous demonstrations of protest against the trial, staged dramatically at Delhi's Red Fort, of "Indian National Army" prisoners. The trial brought to light certain important facts, which appeared to indicate that there was no clear ideologi-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Pp. 892-93.



cal link between Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's I N A and Japanese fascism, that their primary concern was the achievement of Indian freedom and during the pendency of the war the safeguarding of Indian interests in South-east Asia, that there was considerable resentment of Japanese hesitation in rendering them really effective assistance, that the Japanese imposition of fatal restrictions even on the sovereignty over the Andamans which was ostentatiously handed over to Bose's *Azad Hind* (Free India) Government convinced them of fascist bad faith, and that in any case the enthusiastic support the I N A got from Indians in Japanese-occupied countries, whatever its apparent international and ideological implications, was evidence of their one overwhelming desire, namely, the freedom of India. At the Red Fort trial, Jawaharlal made a fitting gesture by appearing as one of the defence counsel, but while the court battle, conducted ably by Bhulabhai Desai, had its own significance, the real battle was fought in the streets of Calcutta and elsewhere. To that battle, if properly taken up, the Congress leadership was entirely disinclined, and a mighty opportunity of appropriately checkmating Britain's and the Muslim League's manoeuvres was missed.

The November incidents were surpassed in February 1946. For three days Calcutta was in flames; police firing on demonstrators demanding release of Abdur Rashid, an I N A prisoner to whom clemency had been refused, led to a spontaneous and magnificent upsurge uniting Hindu and Muslim more notably even than in November. Almost simultaneously, there started strikes among naval and air forces, among soldiers and policemen in different parts of the country. Maulana Azad has left it on record that in front of Calcutta's police headquarters and within the precincts of its heavily guarded Government House, policemen on duty "shouted slogans" in his honour and told him "that they would act according to (his) orders". At Karachi naval officers saw him and asked for instructions, while in Lahore, a Gurkha regiment stationed near the aerodrome lined up



in hundreds to have his *darshan*.<sup>14</sup> The most important and impressive incident of the time was the great strike in the Royal Indian Navy and the concomitant happenings in Bombay (February 21-23) and elsewhere. In fortyeight hours, shootings took toll of no less than 250 civilian lives—a record for the British administration. The Central Naval Strike Committee went ahead with Congress, League and Communist flags intertwined and said in a manifesto: "For the first time the blood of men in the services and of men in the streets flowed together in a common cause. We, in the services, will never forget this. We know also that you, our brothers and sisters, will not forget. Long live our great people. Jai Hind!"<sup>15</sup>

This period saw also (November 1945—July 1946) intense and widespread struggle of the working class and to a lesser extent, of the peasantry. The climax was reached with exuberant preparations for an all-India general strike of railwaymen and of postal and telegraph workers. Nehru seemed to respond to the spirit of the times and spoke of "enormous upheavals" if the people's urge for freedom was not soon satisfied, but with Gandhi as their guide, the leadership, including Nehru, were fearful of such upheavals and did all they could to prevent them. Thus, in December 1945, when the Viceroy in a Calcutta speech, twitted the "Quit India" slogan and said it would not "act as the magic sesame which opened Ali Baba's cave", the Congress Working Committee, then meeting in Calcutta, stressed its reaffirmation of non-violence and pointedly deplored the great Calcutta upsurge that had happened a little over a fortnight earlier. Its resolution on the Indian National Army went out of its way in noting that sympathy for I N A prisoners did not mean any deviation from the Congress policy of "attaining Swaraj by peaceful and legitimate means"—words suggestive of a complete reversal of the "Do or Die"

<sup>14</sup> Azad., *op. cit.*, Pp. 126-27.

<sup>15</sup> H. Mukerjee, "India Struggles for Freedom", Pp. 206 ff. and references therein.



slogan of 1942. Gandhi and other Congress leaders including Nehru and Azad had closed-door talks with Casey, then Governor of Bengal, in course of which, it was widely reported, plans were made for detaching Congress from the developing mass movement.

About the naval mutiny Gandhi wrote it was "thoughtless" and "distressful unrest", and when Aruna Asaf Ali protested at his attitude, he wrote: "Aruna would 'rather unite Hindus and Muslims at the barricades than on the constitution front'. . . . Even in terms of violence, this is a misleading proposition." There was in the minds of Congress leaders a naïve impression that Britain was preparing to leave and we needed only, with happy non-violence, to help their packing. So Jawaharlal himself ridiculed the naval mutiny; he had certain qualms, however, for he tried, almost on the defensive, to explain that barricades and 18th century methods of revolution were out of date: "You cannot fight machine guns with rifles and match big guns with small guns". He conceded that "the iron wall which Britain created between the Indian army and the Indian people had collapsed", but he forgot, under the influence of Gandhi and on account of his own inhibitions, that while sporadic violence can never result in the seizure of power by the people, it was vain and wrong to advise a slave people never to take recourse to arms since they were necessarily out-matched by the State, and to imply that the R.I.N. action was a mere, detached incident and was not helping to forge unity between the people and the armed forces so that together they might triumph over the oppressor.<sup>16</sup>

The brave, new wave of the people's discontent forced from the Government steps intended to mollify it. A delegation of three British Cabinet ministers came to India to negotiate with political parties in April-May 1946. The proposals they made, both short-term and long-term, were essays in an ingenuity which did not fail imperialism even when

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, Pp. 209-10; Tendulkar, *op. cit.*, Vol. VI, Pp 76-79



at bay. An interim government was to be formed at the Centre, with Congress, the Muslim League and other parties and groups participating. For the long-term solution, a Constituent Assembly was to be elected by the newly formed provincial legislatures, and the provinces were to be grouped as A, B and C, each group having the right to secede from the Union—an arrangement whose purpose was to satisfy the League's clamour for partition. There was protracted negotiation, in which Jawaharlal was an uneasy and sometimes perplexed participant. Communal conflict, easy in the fractious temper of the time to engineer, soon came to cloud and overshadow the shine of mass struggle. In a troubled context, the interim government was formed in the second half of 1946; Nehru became vice-president of the Viceroy's Executive Council, for he had been elected Congress president just about that time, again, on Gandhi's recommendation, balking the wishes of an older and by now somewhat embittered man, Sardar Patel. Maulana Azad had willingly made room for Nehru, but soon the latter unconsciously queered the pitch for a nearly finalized agreement between Congress and the League over the Cabinet Mission's proposals—which made Azad regret he had declined to continue another year as president. Nehru's tactical error, which was serious enough in the changed atmosphere of the time, was understandable. He found it difficult to envisage the Groups working in harmony or even in their own sphere; he believed that the scope of the centre, in a country like ours, "inevitably grows, because it cannot exist otherwise"; also in a rather wish-fulfilling fashion, oblivious of his own weakness and lack of will or readiness to launch popular struggles, he stressed the role of the Constituent Assembly which, he said, would function as a sovereign body, uncommitted to policy statements from London. Azad noted that Jinnah who had unwillingly reconciled himself to an agreement with Congress, found the Nehru statement a windfall. He demanded that the whole matter was re-opened and proclaimed Muslim fears that the Congress majority in the



Constituent Assembly would impose their will. At Bombay, on July 27, in a fevered atmosphere the League decided on "direct action" for achieving Pakistan. The tension caused by the contest for power now rose to boiling point. Communal incidents began to take place, at first in a small way, and then on the so-called "Direct Action" day, August 16, and four days following, there happened the "Great Calcutta Killing", conceived in delirium and executed in filth, which threw an ugly pall on our people's hopes of freedom and a happy future.<sup>17</sup>

As the poison of communalism spread deeper into India's body politic, there went on "summit talks" in Delhi, and after wearisome negotiations an Interim Government was formed at the Centre, with Nehru as *de facto* prime minister and Member (of the Viceroy's Council) for external affairs and commonwealth relations. The League, to begin with, abstained from participation, but came in later in October, after yet another round of baffling exchange of unpleasanties. "Our patience is fast reaching the limit", Nehru once said in mid-November: "I cannot say how long we will remain in the Interim Government".<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, a Labour Ministry had come to power in Britain, and the Prime Minister, Attlee (ironically, a former member of the detested Simon Commission of 1927-28) invited the Viceroy, the Congress, the League and the Sikhs to confer in London (December 1946). Nehru went unwillingly, found himself in the company of irreconcilables and had the mortification of being fobbed off with patronizing platitudes while in the name of not contemplating a constitution being forced on "any unwilling parts of the country", Attlee virtually assured Pakistan to Jinnah. Some compensation for this defeat might have come to Nehru as the Constituent Assembly met in Delhi, a few days after the London conference, and speaking on the Objectives resolution he let himself go: "We are at the end of an era . . . and my

<sup>17</sup> Azad, *op. cit.*, Pp. 148-60; Brecher, *op. cit.*, Pp. 120-22.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 124.

mind goes back to 5000 years of India's history. . . . All that past crowds upon me and exhilarates me and at the same time somewhat oppresses me. . . . When I think also of the future . . . I tremble a little and feel overwhelmed by this mighty task. . . ." He requested the League to give up its boycott and to share the new tasks. Of the resolution which called for an independent sovereign republic, he said in characteristic fashion: "It is a Declaration. It is a firm resolve. It is a pledge and an undertaking and it is for all of us, I hope, a dedication".<sup>10</sup>

Moving words could not, however, butter Pakistani parsnips, and debate on the resolution was adjourned till mid-January in the hope that the League might relent. The hope proved futile, and when the objectives resolution was adopted unanimously the League asked London to wind up the Assembly and reiterated that nothing short of Pakistan would be acceptable. On February 20, 1947, Prime Minister Attlee intervened with a declaration, supplementing that of December 1946, which offered some hopes to Congress no doubt but really paved the way for partition. Power, it was declared, would be transferred definitely by June 1948 (which warmed the Congress heart), but if the League kept away from the Constituent Assembly the transference would be to the central government or the provincial governments or in some other suitable way (which clearly meant partition and the League could jubilate). As far as the Indian princes were concerned, British paramountcy over them would terminate and would not devolve upon the successor government or governments. The Attlee declaration was, indeed, an invitation to fissiparous elements to go ahead and make sure that the India over which the British relaxed their grip was rent asunder in every conceivable way.

An illusion, however, had been created, and while Tories in Britain lamented the leaving of India to "men

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 125.



of straw", many in India saw in the declaration fresh proof of British good faith. Professor Laski, then chairman of the British Labour Party, spoke of the offer as one "on a gold platter"—the platter, it seems, had to be gold when its contents were tinsel. There was some suspicion in India of Britain being goaded by an unwonted magnanimity, but Gandhi advised his countrymen to believe in Britain's *bona fides*. It was clear, however, to some, and in retrospect it should be clear to all, that Britain, offering India plans of freedom and ostentatiously pouring oil over troubled waters, at the same time purposely and continuously sustained Muslim League fanaticism in order that the waters might remain troubled enough for Britain to retain her whiphand over the Indian scene. This may sound diabolic, but why must one imagine the world's craftiest imperialism to be of dove-like innocence? And when the Congress, screening a new-found sedateness behind Jawaharlal's fascinating but equivocal phrases, shied as gracefully as it could from militant struggle, for which, in spite of the League, the toiling people, Hindu and Muslim, had shown they were ready, the result was the cruel disaster of the communal blaze which the League did not hesitate to fan and which put fresh heart in sagging imperialism.

The Rt. Hon. A. V. Alexander, member of the Cabinet Mission, said in the House of Commons on July 18, 1946: "I am certain we should have faced a position of uprising and of bloodshed and disturbances in India, and with a future military commitment which no one could at the present moment foresee." This referred not to communal conflict—over which imperialism gloated and which had not become obtrusive in mid-1946—but to the massive unrest of our common people, working by hand and by brain, seeking the balm of freedom. On March 5, 1947, Sir Stafford Cripps said in Parliament that Britain had "fundamentally two alternatives"—either, to maintain direct power in India by "a considerable reinforcement of troops" which was impossible, as Britain "had not the power to carry it out", or



to make the political transfer on the lines it was done. On October 11, 1947, the "Manchester Guardian" wrote editorially: "Public opinion has preened itself on British virtue in withdrawing voluntarily from India. . . . It may be hard to disentangle whether the British action was based on high principle or on a less glorious desire to retreat to shelter before the storm broke".<sup>20</sup> However, the dominant Indian leadership, including a rather harried Nehru, applauded the good Attlee, and then caved in to the Viceroy, Mountbatten's charming gestures for a rapid and hustled accomplishment of the dreaded fact of partition. Fearful of boldly solving the dilemma—hurl for real freedom the organized strength of the people who, even in disorganization, had shown their mettle, or accept a glitteringly cheap, if specious and in many ways painful, offer of independence—the Congress leadership chose the latter course. So, on June 3, Mountbatten announced the plan for the transfer of power—a partition on communal lines of Bengal, Punjab and a part of Assam, and division of British India into two Dominions as from August 15, 1947, the Indian Union and Pakistan.

Jawaharlal, commending to his people the June 3 declaration as the only way out of the crisis, thanked Mountbatten for his "assistance to India". He was unhappy, which naturally Jinnah was not, but he had felt too weighted down with worry and indecision to think sharply and otherwise. Nine years later, he told his biographer, Brecher: "The partition of India became inevitable, I should say, less than a year before it occurred. I think now, looking back, that partition could have been avoided if the British Government's policy had been different, about a year or eighteen months before". It is a pity that even, "looking back", he thought only of what "the British Government's policy" might have been, but not of his own people's and his own Congress organization's. Even Brecher has stated

<sup>20</sup>Quotations in Mukerjee, "Gandhiji", Pp. 175-77.



that perhaps one positive inducement for acceptance of Pakistan was, even for Nehru, the "tempting prize of power" after the tribulations of a long struggle.<sup>21</sup> It is a pity indeed.

Gandhi felt over partition such anguish as makes one think of the garden of Gethsemane. Even he, at the end, had to give way, but the few months of life left him after partition were a kind of vicarious atonement for the original sin that acceptance of partition involved. It is easy to see why a Patel, fond of power as a duck likes water, could pursue the path of discretion rather than of valour and when partition appeared to be the price to be paid, did not have much qualms about it. How Nehru, a very different type altogether, could reconcile himself to the predicament is a great deal more complex story. In his memoirs, Azad repeatedly and sadly referred to Nehru having been rather rapidly won over to acquiescence, however malancholy, in partition. He noted also less basic reasons, like the personality and persuasiveness of the Mountbattens with whom he had developed a rare and genuine kind of friendship.<sup>22</sup> More important considerations were mentioned in one of his reported talks with Brecher—"the compulsion of events" (which by trying to solve the dilemma posed earlier he was not ready and willing to fight), the fact that conditions were deteriorating in the communal sense, a feeling that a federal India, assuming Jinnah did unbend, might be weak, with "constant disintegrating pulls" and unable to plan her life the way he envisaged best for the people, and "also the fact that we saw no other way of getting our freedom—in the near future, I mean".<sup>23</sup> This suggests a peculiar variety of pragmatism, rather unlike Nehru, but there it is.

Perhaps also this great man to whom "the misery of the world was misery and would not let (him) rest", had at the same time something of the historian's vision and

<sup>21</sup> Brecher, *op. cit.*, Pp. 144-45.

<sup>22</sup> Azad, *op. cit.*, Pp. 181-205.

<sup>23</sup> Brecher, *op. cit.*, Pp. 144-45.

equanimity to be able to take things calmly, in spite of the stress and strain to which his anguish subjected him. He perhaps expected, in time, "other forces" growing to redress the balance. And his mind had, in March 1947, thrilled to the idea of a new Asia, wherein India had a special place, when largely on account of him the first Asian Relations Conference was held in New Delhi. He dominated the conference, for which indeed some of his colleagues ridiculed him; the story is told that when the Indonesian demand for independence was enthusiastically mooted, Sardar Patel commented: "Indoncsia, Indonesia, let me see—where is Indonesia? You better ask Jawaharlal about that."<sup>24</sup> Even then, perhaps, Jawaharlal knew that he had "promises to keep" to history, and when the chance of power, howsoever twisted, came to him he could not draw back.

On August 15, 1947, however, there came to our people's minds a great exhilaration—on that day, even in a place like Calcutta, lacerated till the day before by the ugly spears of communalism, the countenance of the people, Hindus, Muslims and all, was, at least momentarily, as the sun shineth in his strength. But the mood and the spirit passed—while perhaps it could have been lasting if we had won our freedom otherwise than by arrangement with an imperialism which craftily exacted a price from us which we could not pay without drastic detriment to our soul. It is partly Jawaharlal's responsibility that we purchased political freedom with coin that was ethically counterfeit, which is why our people do not, even yet, feel sufficiently the glow of that freedom.

\* *Ibid.* Pp. 129-32.



## CHAPTER VIII

### FOR A SECULAR DEMOCRACY

An acute and perceptive study of Luther's early career notes that often "the trauma of near-defeat follows a great man through life".<sup>1</sup> The British transfer of power to a partitioned India on August 15, 1947, and what almost inevitably happened before and after for many agonised months must have brought to Jawaharlal a shock, almost of defeat, whose effects could never be entirely obliterated. Maulana Azad has left a record of Jawaharlal's "distress", "repugnance" and "despair" till in the absence, as he saw it, of any alternative which the country was in a mood to accept, he reconciled himself wearily to the Mountbatten Plan. Gandhi's opposition to the idea of partition was even more pronounced, but even he, in the end, had sorrowfully to concede its coming. At the June meeting of the All India Congress Committee, Azad referred to partition as a "tragedy" which we had failed to avert but which should on no account be allowed to divide our cultural unity and to negate the sense of the nation being one. This was contested by Sardar Patel who felt that it was not out of "weakness or compulsion", but that partition was accepted on the understanding that it was the only true solution in the circumstances. The AICC vote was 29 for accepting and 15 against, an eloquent index of the divided mind of the country.<sup>2</sup>

The great post-war upsurge in India since late 1945, to which the people's enthusiasm over the Indian National Army (which Subhas Chandra Bose had founded) gave a big impetus, was the principal force which compelled the capitulation of imperialism. But because of our own weak-

nesses, in ourselves as well as in relation to imperialism, that the transfer of power meant the exaction of a price, the price of partition, of acerbated communal antagonism, of insensate killings and migrations, and of the demoralization which has followed ever since like an evil taint on our freedom.

It needs to be stressed that India not having to pay much of a price for her freedom—"with such little bloodshed and violence", as Kripalani, Congress president in 1947, had said—is a myth. Apart from the long record of our struggle, where martyrs unwedded to non-violence mounted the gallows and suffered in other ways, the process of the transfer of power to deliberately divided India implied, before and after the event and as an inevitable concomitant thereof, an amount of suffering for millions of people which is hardly less than the suffering involved in perhaps any of the world's great revolutions. Another point to remember is that unlike in such revolutions, the suffering borne by the people of India and Pakistan, before and after the constitution of the two States, was at bottom senseless and no spur, at all, to great endeavour. It was a form of massive agony which numbs body and soul and does not release heightening qualities of character. The manner we won our freedom—and it saddened, most of all, the great Gandhi—has left an unwanted stamp on all that has followed so far.<sup>3</sup>

The fixation of a date for the transfer of power—August 15—seemed, however, as Azad observed, to act "like a charm", and questions that everyone had been asking about a "strange blindness" and about anger or despair having clouded the vision before such a thing as partition could be agreed to, almost vanished in a sudden atmosphere of exultation. All over the country there was "delirious joy" on that date, but of course it was inevitably "short-lived".<sup>4</sup> Responsibility, meanwhile, had devolved in the main on

<sup>3</sup> Cf. H. Mukerjee, "Gandhiji", Pp. 192-93.

<sup>4</sup> Azad, *op. cit.*, Pp. 208-09.



Jawaharlal Nehru, and he tightened up the chords of his soul, as a Franz Kafka might have put it, to confront his country and the world.

And so, on August 14-15, Nehru told his people: "A new star rises, the star of freedom in the East. . . . May the star never set and that hope never be betrayed." In Parliament House, at a ceremony of dedication, he spoke unforgettable words:

"Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. . . . The achievement we celebrate today is but a step, an opening of opportunity, to the greater triumphs and achievements that await us. . . . Peace had been said to be indivisible. So is freedom, so is prosperity now, and so also is disaster in this One World that can no longer be split into isolated fragments."<sup>a</sup>

Nehru made a nation-wide broadcast, calling urgently for an end to internal strife and violence and asking for a concentration of national energies on such essential tasks as increased production and equitable distribution and a radical reform of the system of land tenures. On the Red Fort in Old Delhi, historic scene of Indian splendour in the past, flew the new flag of Indian freedom. Hearts were warmed and the spirit of the country soared, but rumblings of communal warfare—the last, lingering blow of British rule—could already be heard. Punjab and Bengal were the two crucial provinces, rent unnaturally asunder as sacrifices, so to speak, before the altar of freedom. In the former there was to be a full-scale civil war, and a migration, either way, of near twelve million people, the biggest perhaps in history. In the latter, communal passions, though kept within comparatively manageable limits, were lacerating enough. And there were chain reactions, in Delhi, in Bihar

<sup>a</sup> J. Nehru, "Independence and After", Pp. 3-6; cf. Brecher, *op. cit.*, Pp. 136-37.

and elsewhere—together constituting a stupendous problem that would tax the wisest, the most stable and the most experienced administration. Nehru faced up to it with firmness and strength, sustaining himself from time to time with solace and inspiration from that "young man of seventyseven", Mahatma Gandhi, and playing at a perilous moment of Indian history, a courageous and vital role, which showed he was no mere "thinker", but a "doer" also.<sup>6</sup>

"All of us, to whatever religion we may belong", said Nehru on August 15, 1947, "are equally the children of India. . . . We cannot encourage communalism or narrow-mindedness, for no nation can be great whose people are narrow in thought or action". Such words do not usually come from the mint of mere politics, but Jawharlal had the habit, which was often misunderstood by foreigners as a sort of 'holier-than-thou' attitude, of referring to first principles and basic things. "As long as I am at the helm of affairs", he said repeatedly, "India will not become a Hindu state". It needed much courage to say so, when in Delhi particularly, the sight of streams of wretched refugees with their tales of woe and the unspeakable carnage they had escaped from, made the coals of communal revenge glow, unreasonably but powerfully, in many a normally decent Hindu heart. Many are the stories told about Nehru's personal courage during the dark days of the riots in Delhi. Badrud-din Tyabji, now Vice Chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University, and in 1947 a young member of the Indian Civil Service, recounting some of these stories, has written how "for a few months the life of a Muslim (in Delhi) became almost insupportable", but that Jawaharlal rose to the greatest heights: "He fought the reactionary elements in the country, on all fronts, by all the means in his power. He also strove to convert those who, because they had suffered themselves, sought to wreak vengeance on others.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 152, quoting Gandhi's remark to G. D. Birla: "Jawahar is a thinker, Sardar a doer."



In his exertions he showed a courage, stamina and breadth of spirit, which can have few parallels in history."

Over the years, despite pressure from reactionaries and mounting provocation from Pakistan, Nehru's attitude never changed. In 1955, he said in one of his speeches: "They (communalists) are only a relic of some ancient period. They are hung neither in the past nor in the present; they are in mid-air. India tolerates everybody and everything, including mad men; they also exist and carry on. . . . But let us not forget that their (the communalists') trend of thought is a dangerous trend. It is a trend full of hatred. It is a trend that is bad for India today. If we maintain this kind of communalism, whether it is Hindu or Muslim, Christian or Sikh, India will cease to be what it is today. It will go to pieces." One should remember also that right up to the time of his death, he was busy giving the closest thought to the tasks of bridging the gulf between India and Pakistan, over Kashmir and other issues which Pakistan quite often perversely exploited against India and all that India under Jawaharlal stood for, because that way alone could he ensure the secularity of India and the consolidation of democracy.

It is relevant to recall what Maulana Azad pointedly mentioned, namely, Lord Mountbatten's categorical assurance before partition, made to him personally and imprinted in his memory: "I shall see to it there is no bloodshed and riot. I am a soldier, not a civilian. I shall take the sternest measures to nip trouble in the bud. I will order the Army and the Air Force to act and will use tanks and aeroplanes. . . ." This brave promise was not kept, and "nothing effective" was done either to prevent or to stop the "holocaust" on either side.<sup>9</sup> No wonder that even Gandhi had written in an article in "Harijan" (July 20, 1947): "(The Englishman) was quite content to leave India as a cockpit between two

organized armies. Before quitting he was setting the seal of approval on the policy of playing off one community against another."<sup>10</sup>

When on the eve of August '47 and after it, darkness descended on the country and a kind of madness seized our people, it was Gandhi, more than any one, who, like the rock of ages, sustained faith in humanity and worked unremittingly to revive it. Thus Nehru felt closer to him than ever before; "how many realize", he wrote. "what it has meant to India to have the presence of Mahatma Gandhi during these months?" The last great days of Gandhi's life are, in their setting, an epic in itself—his fasts; his insistence that in spite of shocking behaviour on many fronts, Pakistan must receive whatever was her due from India; his indomitable espousal of the guarantees that a secular state must give to all, irrespective of religious affiliation; his prayer-meetings, where he was to face his assassin and die. Every day, in that anxious period, Nehru would visit Gandhi and return, refreshed in spirit. "How can you think of rest", Nehru once, in an intimate moment, told one of his principal *aides*, "when you have been with him (Gandhi)? How can you think of sleep? There are a million things to do and he gives me fresh life every time I see him."<sup>11</sup> Affected most grievously at the death of his master, utterly ashamed, as he said he felt, at the failure of his government "to protect the greatest treasure that we possessed", Nehru said also: "He (Gandhi) would chide us if we merely mourn . . . Let us be worthy of him".<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, a first-class crisis, in the shape of virtually open warfare between India and Pakistan had broken out over the issue of Kashmir. That fair land, original home of the Nehru family, and spoken of by many in India as "heaven on earth" on account of its rare and diverse beauty, was invaded by tribesmen from across the border with the

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in N. K. Bose, "My Days with Gandhi", Pp. 247-48.

<sup>11</sup> H. V. R. Iengar in "Gandhi Marg", July 1964, Pp. 252-55.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Brecher, *op. cit.*, P. 150.



connivance and proven support of highly placed Pakistani officials, and also, it is fairly clear, as part of a subtle scheme, which from behind scenes imperialism, even as it was receding, carefully fostered.<sup>13</sup> The Maharaja, a Hindu prince ruling over a predominantly Muslim population, shilly-shallied over accession to one or the other Dominion, thus muddying the waters between the two, and offered to accede to India when his territory was already under attack and asked for immediate military assistance. It was a difficult decision for India to make, but it was a happy circumstance that the people's movement in Jammu and Kashmir State, predominantly Muslim as it was bound to be, was at the same time progressive in tendency and had links with Congress in India, and particularly with Jawaharlal Nehru who had, in 1946, while Vice President of the Viceroy's Executive Council, seen the inside of a Kashmir jail on account of his sympathy for the people's movement. Indian troops were flown into Srinagar, where the people's militia, organized by Sheikh Abdullah and his National Conference, were already bravely holding out and maintaining morale with wonderful success. Nehru especially consulted Gandhi over the despatch of troops, the matter having delicate political and also moral implications, and Gandhi supported the action intended, as it was, to assist victims of aggression. A military stalemate soon developed and from Pakistan ensued a peculiarly vicious campaign of political recrimination—behind which again the finger of Britain was visible.<sup>14</sup>

India's forbearance in not following upon her military success in Kashmir was turned against her by the manipulation of a total deadlock, a reference (which in retrospect, it appears, should have been avoided) to the United Nations, the setting up of a cease-fire line and the induction of often undesirable foreign military observers. This deadlock has persisted since. It continues to poison the relations of India

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<sup>13</sup> This aspect of the matter is discussed in V. Kumar, "Anglo-American Plot against Kashmir" (Delhi 1954), *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

with Pakistan and is exploited by the latter for purposes of an almost incessant hate-campaign against India, which, apart from its intrinsic unpleasantness, acerbates communal passions in either country, leads to periodic hounding out of large numbers of the Hindu minority from East Pakistan into India, thus upsetting India's economy with a recurrent refugee problem and provoking a chain-reaction of communal misbehaviour which threatens to strike at the roots of India's secularism.

From time to time it is said that if Sardar Patel had his way, he could have solved the Kashmir problem at that very time by pushing ahead with military operations, whatever the risk of full-scale conflict with Pakistan. Those who make the claim imply that Nehru, listening to Mountbatten's advice, decided on calling halt, thereby seeking to appease Pakistan—which was pusillanimous behaviour and should not have been resorted to.<sup>15</sup> The matter, however, was by no means so simple. There is no doubt that the roles of such people as Mountbatten, his *aide* Ismay, Sir George Cunningham, General Sir Rob Lockhart, and sundry Americans like Russel K. Haight who was given the rank of "Brigadier" in the "Azad" Kashmir army, are peculiarly knotted, and whatever the appearance of friendliness to India which Mountbatten kept up with great tact and charm, there was something very dubious about the way the Kashmir issue was allowed to develop and then sought to be checked like the genie held vainly and uneasily in a bottle.<sup>16</sup> It is difficult, however, to blame Nehru and the Indian Cabinet for listening to Mountbatten when, posing as an inter-Dominion peacemaker, he insisted that if the Indian army went ahead to push the invaders beyond Uri and then beyond the State frontiers it would touch off an Indo-Pakistan war which must be avoided. The communal atmosphere being what it was in both countries at that



time, such conflict, it was feared, would bring unspeakable disasters and irreparably damage the future. It is not easy, however, to disentangle the various moves of the British Government in London and of Mountbatten in Delhi—which brought about the reference, by a somewhat harassed Government of India, of the Kashmir problem to the Security Council on December 31, 1947. On this issue, Indian statesmanship undoubtedly failed, for while in normal conditions Nehru's offer, later often repeated, of a plebiscite to confirm the Maharaja's accession to India and strengthen a legal act with moral and political sanction, was a genuine and eminently proper proposal, the way in which the "Western" majority in the United Nations cunningly exploited the position against India, by mischievous machinations which went on for years, should have been, at least to some extent, anticipated. For this default Nehru alone need not be blamed, and Patel who, in regard to the States, was the minister principally concerned must have also succumbed to the blandishments of Mountbatten. Patel did not quite share Nehru's tremendous concern for India's secularism and on the communal issue his anxieties were obviously much less than Nehru's and perhaps also qualitatively different. But the two formed, as Brecher puts it, a "duumvirate," in many ways an awkward alliance and between two very dissimilar types, but an alliance all the same.<sup>17</sup>

This alliance, though somewhat precarious, did hold, at least to outward appearances. In 1950, after a deplorable outburst of communal tension in Bengal, the Sardar, with considerable popular backing, took a tough, almost retaliatory line against Pakistan. Nehru, however, stood firm on the rock of principle and held steadfast to the concept of Indian secularism, whatever the provocations from her neighbour. The result was an agreement between him and the then Pakistani Prime Minister, the Nehru-Liaquat Ali

pact, which was a reasoned attempt to stem the tide of migration, to facilitate return of the refugees to their original homes, to settle problems regarding the plunder of property or any proposed interchanges, and to assure the rights of minorities in either country. Patel did not like it; the fact that Pakistan virtually put the pact in cold storage seemed to stress the wisdom of his view, but did not put Nehru off his plank of principle. However, even though Patel set up his own candidate for Congress Presidentship and saw to it that he won, he conceded to Nehru that the latter's policies were reaffirmed in the Congress resolutions on foreign affairs, India-Pakistan relations, the secular state and economic policies. Before the year (1950) was out Patel was dead—for all his drawbacks a remarkable political leader and a most powerful personality.

It remains to be added that while the integration of the five hundred and odd "states" into the Indian Union—their accession, certain processes of democratization and their reduction in number to about a dozen viable units, together comprising an area of nearly half a million square miles and a population of some ninety million—was largely the achievement of Sardar Patel, Nehru's role in the process was not what some people have said, namely, "negligible".<sup>18</sup> To the decisions regarding policy, Nehru had made an important contribution. He had had personal experience of conditions in the Indian States—it was not easy either to forget what life in Nabha was like, in and out of jail, and in Kashmir (1946) he had seen how the States were puppets in the hands of the British Government's Political Department. He had joined hands with the States people's movement more than Patel had ever done, and more than most other Congress leaders he had persistently called the princely States "relics of medievalism" and fought strenuously the British interpretation of the meaning of the lapse of Paramountcy and their expectations therefrom. Without the

<sup>18</sup> Brecher, *op. cit.*, P. 158; see on this subject, generally, V. P. Menon, "The Story of the Integration of the Indian States", *passim*.



powerful momentum which, in spite of numerous difficulties, the States peoples' movement had created from Kashmir to Travancore and in crucial areas like Hyderabad and the Orissa States, Patel's tasks of integration would have been infinitely more difficult. On no major issue relating to the Princes did Patel or Mountbatten fail to consult Nehru's views. The latter was expressly authorized by Nehru to "negotiate" with the princes, especially with the Nizam of Hyderabad. There is no doubt that Patel's consummate capacities came out in this great transaction, but Nehru's role, while secondary to some extent, was basic and important.

For Nehru's steady passion for secularity, India can only be grateful. Whatever her weakness, India led by Nehru has sought to fashion herself on the foundation of certain principles and has played a role, which need not be either exaggerated or minimised, in contemporary history that can reasonably be a matter of pride. She could not have done so if she had yielded to the passions and prejudices that the conduct of Pakistan, with the connivance of her Western patrons, often provoked. It must not be forgotten that India also has opposite numbers to Pakistani communalists, that like Goldwater in the United States today, Golwalkar and his R. S. S. militants are more than a mere lunatic fringe and could, if they had their way, go in for a Hindu State in India, where Muslims were only to be "territorially Indians". It must not be forgotten that as late as the early months of 1964, parts of India witnessed the most disgraceful communalist frenzy which, whatever the provocation from Pakistan, needed to be sternly controlled and unequivocally condemned. This was, indeed, a most dreadful shock to Nehru and quite possibly hastened his death. All honour to Jawaharlal that he never hesitated to give expression to his agony at such behaviour and to berate his countrymen for the vile lapse into inhumanity which demented communalism brings about. If there are lacunae in India's secularism and many defects still in its working, the blame devolves on our conditions and our own faults which were



felt and sought to be rectified by none more genuinely and staunchly than by Jawaharlal Nehru. Even apart from Nehru, the Congress would, very likely, have subscribed to secularism, but Nehru lent it a certain glow, as he did to whatever in public life he felt deeply for.<sup>19</sup>

Democracy, if it is worth the name, implies a vivid sense on the part of the people of participation in the tasks of social advancement. India with her vastness and variety offered an obvious challenge in this regard, for unity had to overcome the stresses and strains inherent particularly in a situation where imperialism, even at parting, had aimed crafty kicks at our body politic. It was essential, in that context of things, to be ready for realistic recognition of objective factors and also to have a basic social philosophy which would inform one's approach and save it from being merely a pragmatic waiting upon events. Jawaharlal Nehru yielded to no one in his intellectual grasp of that effulgent phenomenon of Indian history, namely, the country's unity in diversity. In his speeches and writings, whether on the problems of culture or of economic planning, one finds many a pearl of thought, with a rare tinge of emotional certitude in this matter. But the work of what has come generally to be called national integration, in the years when Nehru was the country's undisputed guide, often suffered from a hand-to-mouth approach and a subordination of principle to the imagined exigencies of administration or even to certain dominant group prejudices. Some reference to this aspect of things is indispensable for an evaluation of Nehru's effort towards the construction and consolidation of democracy in India.<sup>20</sup>

Before independence, the Congress stood unequivocally for the principle of linguistic provinces, while the British thought only of strategic requirements and administrative



convenience for purposes of demarcating territorial units. After independence, however, when the Congress took over the reins of office, there took place, for a while, something like a *volte-face*. On November 27, 1947, Nehru told the Constituent Assembly *à propos* of the linguistic principle: "First things must come first, and the first thing is the security and stability of India." Whatever the emergency justification of such a formulation, it set up an artificial dichotomy between the security of India and a principle of States organization which was in reality the best guarantee for it. Thus the Dar Commission report (Dec. 1948), and more relevantly for our purposes, the findings of the J. V. P. Committee consisting of Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel and Pattabhi Sitaramayya emphasised that while linguistic reasons were important, there were other equally important factors also, such as economic, administrative and financial considerations which had to be taken into account. It appeared as if the pressure of dominant bourgeois elements, interested in exploiting the Indian economy as a whole and keen on a form of government which concentrated authority in the centre was working, perhaps insensibly, even upon Nehru. He was conscious of his own predilection for theory and with a certain innate humility often found himself constrained to yield to what most of his political colleagues and official *aides* persisted in pointing out as insuperable practical considerations.

This was seen over and over again and to the detriment of Nehru's image. The insistent and overwhelmingly popular demand for an Andhra State was resisted with a wooden stubbornness, till the martyrdom of Sriramalu and the massive struggle of the people which preceded and followed it wrung from Nehru an apparently unwilling announcement (December 19, 1952). Even after the States Reorganization Commission was set up and reported (1953-55), Nehru and his government bungled over the issue of Maharashtra and Gujarat, toyed for a dangerous while with a separate status of Bombay city (which was what big money



interests wanted), tried to drown by repression the stupendous popular movement in that crucial region, led by the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti and the Maha Gujrat Parishad, and ultimately (May 1960), after many lives were lost and great suffering endured, agreed to the wishes of the people. On the specious plea of national interest but virtually in order to defeat the radical militancy of West Bengal politics, (which, again, big money interests particularly feared and detested), Nehru allowed himself to be supporting an obviously unprincipled and uncalled-for merger between West Bengal and Bihar, again to be defeated by a combination of popular forces ready to be hurled into battle against the fantastic scheme. In June-July 1960, Assam was the scene of a flare-up against the Bengali minority, which underlined, no doubt, the complications of our linguistic problem but they were uneasily covered over, not even an inquiry having to this day been held into the happenings. This was an instance of regional bourgeois groups distorting the rightful desires of the masses and stirring up inter-State rivalries, as in the yet unsolved controversy over Belgaum between Mysore and Maharashtra and over the distribution of rights over river waters in some of the southern States. Unfortunately, Nehru, who did know better, was perhaps badgered by the plethora of quickly proliferating practical problems almost into thinking of national integration as an administrative question rather than a socio-economic challenge that needed to be tackled with imagination and with sympathy even for excessive hopes in a people newly rising to freedom.

To Nehru's credit it must be said that more than most others, he gave deep thought to the problem of what are called the "scheduled tribes" and their integration into India. Whether in the forest fastnesses of Madhya Pradesh or in Nagaland, in sub-Himalayan pockets or on the Nilgiri slopes, these tribes, though kept for centuries beyond the pale, have lived in isolation no doubt but yet as genuine components of India, their dances and their folk-



lore revealing, no less than the philosophy of sophistication, the soul of our land. Nehru always stressed that the tribes should not be looked upon as museum pieces to be admired from a distance or be assimilated entirely into the main body of Indian society, but that the Naga and the Khasi, the Santal and the Gond, the Tulu and the Kurumba, should retain their identity and distinctive culture and yet be an integral part of India. It needs to be recalled that the biggest separatist movement in post-independence India was started by a tribal people, the Nagas, and also that Nehru had been the moving spirit behind the steps leading to the formation recently of an autonomous Nagaland. The healing touch which Nehru wanted to bring to bear on the situation will, it is hoped, be soon and effectively applied on a larger scale. A socio-economic approach, however, linked to imaginative insight and fellow-feeling, remains firmly to be evolved.

A serious lag in this regard has indeed bedevilled every effort so far to tackle problems of what are rather ungenerously termed "linguism" or "regionalism", forgetting the essential justice behind even crudely formulated demands for equitable distribution of opportunities for popular advancement. Obscurantist ideas like an exaggerated consciousness of caste and a fake solidarity around it, fostered by reactionaries of every sort, have to be sternly fought, and Nehru in this regard did more than his share of the job. But even he, with his crystal mind, did not see—or if he did, put a quick veil over it—that the social and economic policies so far pursued, while they offered palliatives, had not ensured that the living and working conditions of the overwhelming majority belonging to hitherto oppressed castes and communities did really improve in a basic sense. Radical changes in the land relations, which badly affect the scheduled castes and other backward sections of the people, have still to be effective. By this means alone can the last blow be given to the lingering feudal system, and economic planning made possible



in a manner that would guarantee work for the mass of unemployed and under-employed rural people.<sup>21</sup> These thoughts were implicit, however, in the Nehru vision of the India that is to be, and while he could not complete the task or perhaps even thought that he should hasten slowly—alas, too slowly!—it remains for India today to make up her mind that while pious pleas for national integration are helpful towards creating a climate of opinion, positive steps, economic, political and social, must be adopted to cure radically the divisive maladies which recurrently upset our corporate life.

It would be a travesty to think of Nehru as a conservative which he was not, by a long chalk, either by temperament or by conviction. But he often gave luminous wings to his thought, pursuing at the same time policies and actions that were not arrayed strongly enough against stagnancy. He would even be prepared to let sleeping dogs lie, if they went on sleeping and did not stink too obtrusively! Thus over the question of remaining in the British Commonwealth of Nations,<sup>22</sup> it was the decision of Nehru, above all others, that in spite of pledges to the contrary during the struggle for freedom India should not break away, but accept the British Crown as the symbol of a larger association to which India belonged. It appears that Mountbatten had even tried to worm India into including the Crown in the design of the Indian flag, but the effort failed. Perhaps Nehru, in his new-found role in a difficult setting, wanted to play safe, to avoid isolation, to be mindful of current economic relations with the Commonwealth and especially with Britain, and to move cautiously towards stabilizing India's external relations. The act rankled, however, for it was Nehru, more than almost any other Congress leader, who had stood for *Purna Swaraj*, severing (as the Indepen-

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, Pp. 60-64, quoting E. M. S. Namboodiripad's article on caste.

<sup>22</sup> Brecher, *op. cit.*, Pp. 161-62, stresses that the Declaration of London (April 1949) which formalized India's continued membership of the Commonwealth expressly called the latter "British" and emphasised common allegiance to the Crown.



dence Day pledge of January 26, 1930, had said) the British connection which had "ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually." He had in his autobiography, envisaged "close association with a socialist Britain", if the Labour Party, most of whose leaders were "socially conservatives of the deepest dye" by any chance "went Left". That, of course, had not happened, and yet Nehru chose to keep India in doubtful company. He had said, of course, in extenuation of compromises that even "the implacable Lenin" had made them, for life and politics were much too complex for us always to think in straight lines. "If we are clear about our principles and objectives," Nehru wrote, "temporary compromises will not harm".<sup>23</sup> Fifteen years after the Declaration of London, it remains a moot question whether Nehru had done the right thing in keeping India in the Commonwealth.

Nehru had been too busy to be directly involved in the drafting processes of the Indian Constitution, the longest written instrument of its type in history, prepared with ponderous efficiency over a period of nearly three years, "a forbidding document", as Brecher says, with its inordinate length and profusion of detail, and redeemed, in popular estimation, by an inspiring preamble and chapters on fundamental rights and the directive principles of State policy. In the early discussion over the Objectives resolution, Nehru had of course dominated, and he had been Chairman of three important committees whose reports were the basis of the drafts to be discussed and incorporated in the Constitution. Besides, as party leader both inside Government and outside it, Nehru had necessarily a large hand in all fundamental decisions regarding the Constitution. During his rare interventions in the Constituent Assembly, he stressed points which showed the way his mind was working. He was strongly in favour of a powerful central government, for reasons not only of the stability and security of the State

<sup>23</sup> Nehru, "An Autobiography", Appendix A, and Pp. 583, 594.

but also of his favourite idea of economic planning. He was entirely opposed to the suggestion of proportional representation, thus leaning heavily on the side of the British form of parliamentary elections. And his influence was cast in favour of moderate policies when, for instance, enthusiasts for a rapid switch-over from English to Hindi as the country's official language needed to be curbed by reference not only to the special position of English on account of historical reasons that cannot be wished away but also, and more important, to the cause of other Indian languages (equally of "national" concern as Hindi) which should not suffer because of precipitate adoption of one official language before the ground was prepared. This question has not yet been solved, and Nehru himself fumbled from time to time over it. He alone among the country's top leaders, had the sense and the stature to call over-enthusiastic people to order and see that a delicate balance was not upset. Regarding a firm solution, however, he has left indications but not a clear direction.

A clearer contribution was the large and important role that Nehru played in helping to provide through a broadly parliamentary system of government, a durable foundation to Indian democracy. It may be that even without Nehru's leadership the country would have acquired this system, but perhaps without him it would not have taken quickly such "clear shape". W. H. Morris-Jones, a close student of parliament in India, has remarked on this subject: ". . . now the network of canal courses along which power has to run is cut deep into the political soil, and limits are set. No one will quite walk in Nehru's exact footsteps, but Nehru's great achievement may be to have made this unnecessary. There is a good path"<sup>24</sup>—the path that Nehru, pre-eminently has laid.

Discussion by duly elected representatives of the people



and implementation by the administration of decisions reached by way of such discussion at various levels from the village *panchayat* to Parliament, is the essence of parliamentary democracy. How this can be best facilitated in Indian conditions is our problem.<sup>25</sup> Nehru felt, rightly, that our own historical experience in India had enabled us to make a good job, if we made the requisite effort, of parliamentary institutions, provided we adapted them to our conditions and made from time to time whatever changes were necessary. He knew, surely, of the equivocal attitude of voluble friends like the late John Strachey, torn between admiration and the habit of patronizing superiority, as when he wrote: "Indian democracy, with real contested elections, a genuinely exercised universal franchise, competing political parties and a high degree of liberty of opinion, association etc. is a marvellous, if precarious, achievement, for an underdeveloped country." It is noteworthy that while the achievement is described as "marvellous", it is also said to be "precarious", for aren't these Orientals, after all, rather devoid of the spiritual stamina or some conveniently intangible 'Western' quality which sustains free government? And so Strachey and his like point out that the parliamentary system has failed in country after country in the East, India, luckily tutored by Britain, being no more than a somewhat "precarious" exception to the general rule.<sup>26</sup> Quite by way of contrast, Nehru showed a neat sense of realism and of the post-war political perspective in Asia and Africa which has changed beyond recognition: did not K. M. Panikkar, whose loss Indian scholarship cannot adequately mourn, once say that the period before the Second World War now looks like "a forgotten *ancien régime*"? Addressing a New Delhi seminar (Dec. 6, 1959) on parliamentary democracy, Nehru told his audience:

"You have to think not merely in some academic way

of the form of government you have or you should have, but also in terms of that form of government or political structure which will fulfil the demands made upon it by the age. Whether parliamentary structure will ultimately answer this question or not, I do not know. But I should imagine that the parliamentary form of government and approach to problems is more likely to answer that question than any other, as other forms are likely to lead ultimately to some measure of authoritarianism. If it does not, it has become out of date and may have to go. However theoretically good it may be, it has to answer the question put to it by the age. If it answers those questions, it is well established."<sup>27</sup>

Nehru knew that over the years the whole character of parliament has changed drastically, and that only Anglo-Saxon chauvinists and anaemic pedagogues could think of it as an insular British plant which was bound to languish elsewhere, and more so in India's scorching air. Unlike politicians and publicists who, when referring to parliament, hardly look beyond the 19th century in Britain, Nehru stressed the fact that "most of the battles for a democratic conception of parliamentary government were fought on the political plane—for instance, the fight for votes for all, votes for women and the gradual widening of the franchise till it becomes adult franchise". Political change by itself was soon understood to be "not enough", and thus there has been an advance to "the plane of economic democracy" and the ideal of "complete equality of opportunity". This has happened everywhere, Nehru stressed, "though the methods adopted may be different".<sup>28</sup>

In Jawaharlal's speech, just cited, there are other valuable observations which might well be reproduced:

"In other countries real full-blooded political democracy came after a good deal of education had spread, be-

<sup>27</sup> "Journal of Parliamentary Information" (Lok Sabha, New Delhi), April, 1958), P. 4.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, cf. Mukerjee, *op. cit.*, Pp. 143-44.



cause of the economic revolution and all that which had prepared the ground for it, which had added to the resources of the country and thereby made it easier to fulfil the demands made by the people in those countries. In most Asian countries, on the other hand, particularly in India, we have taken a huge jump to 100 per cent. political democracy, without the wherewithal to supply the demand which a politically conscious electorate makes. . . . There is a hiatus now between desires and their non-fulfilment, and all our political life is really concerned with how rapidly to bridge this gulf, this hiatus. We may call it the Second Five Year Plan or whatever it may be, but it is an attempt to bridge this hiatus, firstly because it is right in itself that the people should have at least the primary things of life supplied to them, and secondly, some other good things of life."

Nehru spoke as he almost always did, extempore, but his sense, and his earnestness, is plain. It was made even plainer when his attention was drawn to an important statement by the well-known liberal American columnist, Walter Lippmann, made after a visit (1960) to India, questioning whether what India needed, namely, "a gigantic economic revolution" could be carried out by "parliamentary politicians and civil servants without the dynamism and the discipline of an organized mass movement". Nehru remarked that this was the observation of no "firebrand", and added: "This is the problem which is before us, and we have to solve it. We have to face gigantic problems, but the question comes whether this apparatus of ours—I am not referring to the basic parliamentary apparatus—is adequate. I think the basic apparatus is adequate or can be made adequate, but we must realize that the way in which it is functioning at present is not adequate". Re-affirming his stand, he said further: "I am not challenging the basis. But I wish to say that we are functioning more and more in a mid-Victorian way, not realizing the urgency of our problems, and arguing and throwing our

problems like a shuttlecock from one place to another." He admitted also that the administrative apparatus of the country was the same as in British days, but it needed to be made quick-moving so that the complicated problems of today could be dealt with.<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps even with his fairly Atlas shoulders, Nehru had too much of a job thrust on him, and it would be too much again to expect him to make a good showing on so many different planes. Besides, there was indeed in him a strain which made him "the dilettante eternal who was continuously existing at several, very often anti-podal planes", who could "almost at the same breath . . . discuss Lenin and Nebuchadnezzar, Yeats and *Charkha*, a tennis match and the shooting down of a terrorist in a Kanpur park", who, on account of a charming and unconscious "operational levity", sowed, without knowing it, some of the "seeds" of "the contemporary Indian tragedy."<sup>30</sup> This might seem to many to be observation made from a rather rarefied air, but the fact remains that the instruments which Nehru sought to use (and did not make much of an effort to change) for the achievement of his declared objectives were very much at variance with the requirements of his conviction and the programmes he promulgated. Enough can be picked out of his writings about "sun-browned" bureaucrats being out of place in new India and about dynamic changes calling for a new type of administrator, but in spite of long continued and unchallenged authority he never acted accordingly. Even when the socialist aspirations of India with her expanding public sector and her far-reaching obligations in the world outside were jeopardized by the defaults and defects and even deliberate mischief-making of high ranking service personnel, Nehru would, oftener than not, rush not only to protect his protégés—after all, some good man had thought of the phrase: "Love me, love my dog"!—but to shower



undeserved praise on them, not even noticing that a British knighthood was perhaps cherished by them more than the *Padmabibhushan*. Good man as he was, Nehru was unaware, for all his greatness, that the élite among his officers held him no doubt, in great respect but not so much for the qualities which had endeared him to his benighted people but because he was—which is a fact—a wonderful good fellow who wore, if only he cared to, an old school tie of a pattern which they envied. High in the ranks of the Foreign Service there have been, from all accounts, some people who, in spite of being directly under Nehru's surveillance, tarnished India's image abroad, particularly in Afro-Asian countries. With a certain endowment of conventional capability and also of virtues that might be ordinarily unexceptionable if somewhat unimportant, namely, meticulousness as copyists of "Western" social manners, to the extent even of being able to mix a good cocktail, some of them developed a lordly variety of what a wag once called "Nigger-Nordicism", lifting their noses at the Afro-Asian "invasion" of the world diplomatic scene, advertising a fatal ignorance of the most significant trends of current history (which, ironically, Jawaharlal had been always most acutely conscious of), and letting down India at a most crucial period of her life. It is difficult to understand, but it remains a fact that Nehru, who could not have been entirely unaware of such things, did little that was tangible to stop the rot which the Establishment in India's administration connoted. The damage which the latter could do was kept at a minimum only on account of Nehru being on the scene and like Shiva, drinking up the poison which some of his minions extracted from their assignment. But Nehru's successors, not being in the same street, need very much to be careful. If they are not, the Establishment will perhaps, unless it sees reason and changes itself, make mincemeat of worthwhile policies by their peculiarly perverted genius for malimplementation.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> This subject is discussed in an interesting article, *Ibid.*, Pp. 1245-46.



If Nehru's "measures" were implemented by "men" who "knew what they fought for and loved what they knew" the face of India would have changed a great deal more in the seventeen years of his being at the helm. But for that, steps were necessary which, with all his goodwill, Nehru could not persuade himself to take. This was not the fault of Nehru alone, but perhaps of the circumstances prevailing, which Nehru was unable to outsoar. Here is inability which, in a man so crucial to history, has cast a shadow on the steps of our advance and makes us falter rather than stride ahead. Why is it, for instance, that the man who spoke so wonderfully in 1946 of lighting "the glow of freedom" in the hearts of our people did not sufficiently realize that while he was often beautifully beating his wings in the void it was, in the absence of concomitant and concrete work for the people, just so much ineffectual, even if it was angelic, noise? Why is it that with his unique position and the charm and generosity that was part of his being, he could not heal feuds in the country, whether communal or regional or political? Why is it that he took on too much of an administration that was largely out of step with his aims, and could not lead and inspire a post-independence crusade against communal reaction which recurrently raises its head and sullies our country? Why is it that even for the Plans, for which he had an undoubted passion, he could not launch, or perhaps even think of seriously launching, a movement of the people to make it their own, but preferred to be beguiled instead by essentially administrative measures like the setting up (which was good as far as it went) of Community Development schemes which, for lack of genuine popular participation, have withered where they should have bloomed? It may be that communists in India, in their wish-fulfilling search for revolutionary potentialities in given situations and with over-eager zeal have often a proclivity towards obfuscating objective reality, but did not the interests of India and the qualities of statesmanship require some moderation in



Government's offensive against communism in 1948-51, an offensive which recoiled on Government in the shape of communists being sent by popular vote to parliament in larger number than any other opposition group? Even more, was it right and proper, and in the interests of the country, when in 1959, the Congress party, with Nehru's blessings, howsoever cloaked, took recourse to undemocratic practices in virulent measure in order to bring down, by main force, the duly elected government in Kerala for no other tenable reason than that it was communist and was trying, in a difficult setting aggravated by deficiencies in the constitution itself, to bring some tangible benefits to the toiling masses of that State?<sup>32</sup>

Here is a lengthy series of questions, necessarily somewhat rhetorical, which could easily be much longer, but there is no need for it. However, it should be clear that for all his genuine ache for social change, for reversal of processes that have brought so much misery to our world, for revolution in society as well as in the minds and hearts of men, Jawaharlal Nehru had an almost ineradicable allergy towards the action that obviously was required if his goals were to be achieved. Even in the brave days of the national struggle for freedom, one saw from time to time that this man whom, as Gandhi said, none could excel in bravery or in the love of the country, would hesitate and shrink and retire into his shell and even flagellate himself but could not bring himself, at some cost no doubt to his presuppositions and expectations, to plunge straight into action. He was made of such fine clay that perhaps the rods which measure consistency, inner balance or proficiency do not quite apply to the relevant dimensions. Nevertheless, Nehru remains, as all great men must in some measure remain, an enigma in that the action which his thoughts and his words and some times his bearing itself would connote did not quite

<sup>32</sup> On this subject, E.M.S. Namboodiripad makes, in studiedly mild words, a strong criticism of Nehru's role, "A Democrat in the Dock", in "A Study of Nehru", ed. R. Zakaria (Bombay, 1959), Pp. 222-26.

often materialize, because such action was not set in motion.

"My politics", Nehru wrote in his autobiography, "had been those of my class, the bourgeoisie", adding that "indeed all vocal politics then (and to a great extent even now) were those of the middle classes."<sup>33</sup> This continues perhaps to be true in India, even today, about "all vocal politics". And it may be that while Nehru might have disregarded visible pulls of his class in politics, there were invisible, yet effective, pulls at which perhaps he turned a blind eye. Insensibly, thus, he might have persuaded himself into decisions which meant avoidance of basic damage to the interests of that class. In any case, without bringing in concepts of sociology, one can recall the fact of Nehru being wedded to the Congress in a manner which inevitably cramped his style. Before as well as after 1947, he was acutely aware from time to time that the majority of his colleagues did not share his fundamental ideas, and yet he never thought of leaving the Congress—in 1951 and 1957, he toyed with the idea of retiring from the Congress but not of renouncing it and forming a new combination. Probably he thought of the Congress as still the most effective political instrument; even more, one can be sure that he had a deep emotional attachment to the Congress, his whole working life having been bound up with its fortunes, its joys and griefs, its successes and failures, and he could not think of wrenching himself away. Once twitted for keeping the political company that he did, he wrote:

"You accuse me of limiting myself to being merely the Congress Party leader. It is difficult for me to judge myself or my activities. Perhaps you are right to some extent, but I do not myself understand what people mean by saying that I should leave party and become, what is called, a national leader. Does that not ultimately mean starting a new party and be limited by that? We have had many

<sup>33</sup> "An Autobiography", P. 48.



great men in the past who, rebelling against the caste system or something else, ended merely starting a new *sampradaya*. To the multitude of our gods and goddesses and of our sects, they added a few more.

"Jayaprakash Narayan has frequently summoned me to this national leadership, that is, to get together men of goodwill from all groups and parties and march ahead. Exactly where one is going to march to and in what manner and by what methods is not made clear. It appears to be thought that if people of goodwill just got together in a room, all would be well. As Jayaprakash, for whom I have always had a good deal of affection, is entirely opposed to both my domestic and foreign policies, I do not quite know how both of us together will chalk out a common path. If that is so between us two, what of a larger crowd?

"We are all, I suppose, rather lonely persons, sometimes doubting what we ourselves say or do . . . ." <sup>34</sup>

In a sombre mood he wrote again, some years later: " . . . Repeatedly in the course of my life I have felt pretty miserable and there has been *une faiblesse d'esprit*. Some turn of events or perhaps something inside me made me get over that particular weakness, even though it did not succeed in bringing much light to my mind. The rush of activity and hard work has helped me to carry on and not lose myself. I realise that that is not enough and what I do may not be very worthwhile. Still, I suppose, at the back of my mind I feel that there is some worth in what I do. If I did not feel that way, I could not carry on. I suppose I can only explain all this by saying that I have some faith which keeps me going. I could not exactly explain what that faith is . . . ." <sup>35</sup>

Whatever criticism, honestly felt, might be made of Jawaharlal's life-work, which is an open book, here was a wonderful man who did not give us in India all that we had asked and expected of him, but he gave us "God's plenty".

## CHAPTER IX.

### PLANNING AND PURPOSE

In 1934-35, writing his autobiography, Jawaharlal Nehru brooded in prison over the problems confronting India, even as "in the Soviet country a great new world was being built up before our eyes," wondered "if really radical results could be obtained by slowing down the rate of change" which, to his regret, had often involved much misery, spoke of "reformism" as "an impossible solution of any vital problem at a critical moment when the basic structure had to be changed," and noted: "In India, only a revolutionary plan could solve the two related questions of land and industry as well as almost every other major problem before the country. 'There is no graver mistake', as Mr. Lloyd George says in his *War Memoirs*, 'than to leap the abyss in two jumps'."

Ever since the late 'twenties, Nehru had spoken of the virtues of economic planning and its indispensability, particularly when India was to be free and in possession of the means to remould her set-up nearer the heart's desire. In December 1929, presiding over the Lahore Congress, Nehru referred to "the philosophy of socialism" and its permeation all over the world, and averred: "India will have to go that way if she seeks to end her poverty and inequality though she may evolve her own methods and may adapt the ideal to the genius of her race."<sup>2</sup> He placed the same thesis in more resplendent language before the Lucknow Congress (1936), and in the meantime, his espousal at the Karachi Congress (1931) of a resolution on fundamental rights and an economic programme had the same aim. At the Faizpur



session (1937) of the Congress, where also he presided, there was evolved a Charter of Peasant Demands, following as it did, during the previous meeting of the Congress at Lucknow and in the same pandal, the formation of the organization of the peasantry, the All India Kisan Sabha (1936). The next Congress (1938) at Haripura was presided over by Subhas Chandra Bose, before the break had taken place between him and Gandhi, and Bose's speech, though without the theoretic clarity and literary beauty of the Nehru orations, was a go-ahead performance which sought to give concrete content to socialism in terms of Indian economic development. It was Subhas Chandra Bose, as Congress President, who appointed the National Planning Committee (1938) to work out the implications of planning, and called upon Jawaharlal to be its chairman. Bose's name is too often forgotten when planning is spoken of; even Jawaharlal, in "The Discovery of India", for some reason omits mention of his name while referring to this matter.<sup>3</sup> It is necessary to recall the association of the two names over planning (Bose in his own way was really keen on it), which indeed was most appropriate. Nehru and Bose were two very different types, temperamentally remote from each other, intellectually and emotionally also responding to different basic stimuli, mindful, no doubt, of each other's capacities as they were so often thrown together in national work but sensible of a certain inarticulate distance between themselves, perhaps yearning in different ways to muster greater mutual understanding and even affection but somehow failing in the process—a study in psychology, which could, in a happier setting, be a rewarding effort.<sup>4</sup> Apart, also, from the personal aspect of the matter, interesting and important in itself, it is not only permissible but incumbent to recall that if perhaps the two could come nearer politically

<sup>3</sup> "The Discovery of India", Pp. 400-09, 512-15.

<sup>4</sup> In "A Bunch of Old Letters", the Nehru-Bose correspondence should be read together; there is much more in it than controversy, as when Subhas writes from jail to ask Jawahar to send some books from his library.



—if, that is to say, the context of the time helped them to do so—our recent history could conceivably have been different.

The National Planning Committee functioned effectively for about a year and a half before Nehru was sent to jail (Oct. 1940), to stay there, except for a few months' respite, till the summer of 1945. It was "a remarkably representative committee", in some ways "a strange assortment of different types," "an odd mixture" which, it was feared sometimes, would not perhaps work. Planning, however, was in the air, though Nehru sometimes had a feeling that most of his Congress colleagues had set up the committee "as if only to humour him", and in spite of lions and lambs lying together, all agreed on the objective of having within ten years a two to three hundred per cent. increase in the national wealth though "a really progressive standard of living would necessitate the increase by five or six hundred per cent." Nehru has left on record his gratification to have "come in touch with so much ability and earnestness in all departments of national activity", adding characteristically that "these contacts added to my own education greatly". He gave a great deal of time, in the midst of his exacting political work, to the committee, and between December 1938 and September 1940 he "presided over seventyone of a total of seventytwo meetings of the Committee, had informal meetings with Secretaries of Sub-Committees and issued notes and instructions for the guidance of the members."<sup>5</sup> He would clarify Congress policy, as when he assured the committee that though the Congress was anxious about the growth of cottage and village industries it had never made any decision against large-scale industry.<sup>6</sup> He knew that without national independence there could not be a comprehensive plan of the kind that was needed, covering all aspects of the material and cultural life of our people, each part fitting into a general pattern, but

<sup>5</sup> Cf. P. C. Mahalanobis' valuable essay in "A Study of Nehru", *op. cit.*, Pp. 309-20; also "The Discovery of India", Pp. 400-09.

<sup>6</sup> In "A Bunch of Old Letters", there are some interesting letters on this point.



he knew also that India had to get ready for her future, which could not be too long delayed.

Sixteen final and ten interim reports on diverse aspects of the economy were ready by September 1940, and then with Nehru in jail, work was suspended. It had thus not been found possible to co-ordinate the separate drafts into an integrated national plan. Soon some of India's top industrial magnates, to take the wind out of the sails of radical hotheads, got together "a plan of economic development for India" which was published in 1944 and was usually called the "Bombay Plan". It is intriguing to recall that while their aim was to perpetuate a capitalist economy, their targets were ambitious enough, and if reached, would have meant a definite advance. However, the National Planning Committee resumed its labours in September 1945, at a time when there had been considerable thinking over the subject. As soon as the "Interim Government" came into the picture (September 1946) Nehru immediately set up a planning advisory board which produced a report by the end of the year. In spite of the multitudinous anxieties and difficulties of the period, Nehru never lost sight of planning, and in November 1947 formed an economic programme committee of the Congress, with himself as chairman, which submitted a report in January 1948. It was on the basis of this report that a permanent Planning Commission was established in 1950. Nehru had an idea of keeping out of it, but he was persuaded to become its chairman. It was a happy decision, for "little progress would have been possible in strategic issues without his leadership and guidance."<sup>7</sup>

It might be remarked, in passing, that K. T. Shah, on whom Nehru had relied as his first planning expert, found himself constrained to leave the Congress<sup>8</sup> and advised Nehru himself to go out of the government and prepare the country

<sup>7</sup> Mahalanobis, *op. cit.*, Pp. 310-15.

<sup>8</sup> Professor K. T. Shah functioned in the Constituent Assembly and Provincial Parliament (1947-52) as an opposition member, and when the Constitution was promulgated, unsuccessfully fought Rajendra Prasad for the office of President.

for socialism. It is idle to speculate on what would have happened if he had followed the advice, or even pursued his own inclination a few years later to leave office. However, he did not break away from the shackles that bound him to his party and to the government apparatus. One recalls this point, because recurrently very responsible people ask: 'why didn't he do something drastic to prevent the civil service and the administration sabotaging what little socialistic content there was in Government's measures, when he knew full well how it hampered him?' And a noted journalist, no foam-at-the-mouth politician, gives the reply: "his love of good form, his weakness for outward show and lofty disregard of unpleasant necessities".<sup>9</sup>

His experience of what happened at the time of the transfer of power and afterwards seems to have imposed on Nehru's mind some kind of a fixation about stability. The old fire would suddenly blaze for a moment as when he told off Capital scathingly: "... during this last war a certain section of the employer class ... behaved exceedingly badly ... We have to find some means and machinery to prevent this kind of shameful traffic in human beings and profiting at the expense of the nation". However, the Industrial Policy resolution of 1948, in fear of which Capital had threatened to go "on strike", was found to be something of a damp squib, with no resemblance to socialism. Twitted on this account, Nehru answered in the Constituent Assembly: "There has been destruction and injury enough, and certainly I confess to this House that I am not brave and gallant enough to go about destroying any more."<sup>10</sup> It was a very cautious Nehru, the very contrast of his intrepid self, so different from the one who wrote: "Individuals and nations who do not know how to die do not know also how to live. 'Only where there are graves are there resurrections'."<sup>11</sup> Thus he stood for a mixed economy, intent on whatever increase in

<sup>9</sup> Editorial article, "Nehru Era", in "Economic Weekly", *op. cit.*, P. 1166.

<sup>10</sup> Quotations in Brecher, *op. cit.*, Pp. 194-95.

<sup>11</sup> "The Discovery of India", P. 478.



production could be achieved rather than on a change in the ownership of the means of production. It was, Brecher says, "socialization of the vacuum", the entry of the State into areas of development where private capital, hungering for quick returns, would not care to enter, since in those fields, like power, irrigation, transport and agricultural improvement, profits were low and the period of gestation too long. For nearly a decade after independence, as the people's impatience increased at the continuing paradox of a country potentially rich and its people abysmally poor, Nehru applied the brakes and tried to play safe. Even the First Five Year Plan, launched with much fanfare, was little more than a desperate holding operation, modest in scope and cautious in approach, based largely on projects already prepared, some of which like the Damodar Valley Corporation and the Chittaranjan Locomotive Factory had actually started. At that time India was producing a meagre one million tons of steel, though the country had the world's largest reserves of high quality iron ore. It had been decided tentatively to set up a million-ton steel plant, but British and U.S. interests, to whom above all India looked at that time, poured cold water on the idea and it was soon dropped. Planning, it was clear, was a more serious business than being lyrical about the picture of an industrially transformed India travelling with dignified steps towards socialism. Nehru well knew it himself ; no one could put it so beautifully as when he said that his generation of Indians had been sentenced to hard labour and that to take one's ease was sin. His strong point was the capacity to offer his people fresh, evocative goals and "to take the vision a notch higher every time." But between enunciation and implementation of policies there was always a wide divergence which he could not eliminate.

It might indeed be said that in spite of indubitable and in some spheres far-reaching economic progress which the Nehru Plans have brought India, the fact remains that basic tasks are (and unless a qualitative change is introduced in planning and its execution will continue to be) unfulfilled.



A planned economy should aim at doing away with the anarchy of the 'market', with its concomitants of stock exchange manipulation and run-away prices. It should remove the immeasurable and all-pervading stranglehold of capital through the operations of high finance by private agency. It should stabilize wages as well as prices, and bring down unemployment till it disappears altogether from the social scene. Planning, again, can be said to be successful only if, after a while, it puts an end to the recurrent malady of unplanned, profit-centred economy, namely periodic and more or less disastrous crises. On all these counts, Indian planning has fallen far short. It was not just facetiousness that made an economic journal write: "Midway through the First Plan, when the effects of the Korean boom wore off, everybody talked about a crisis of falling prices and increasing unemployment. Five years later, we all shuddered at the foreign exchange crisis that bore down upon us, and madly readjusted the Second Plan. And now, halfway through the third plan, we have another crisis, this time of rising prices. It looks almost as if we do not feel alive if every five years there is no general oratory about the catastrophe round the corner."<sup>12</sup>

Nehru had the honesty to tell the Congress at Avadi (1955), towards the end of the First Plan period that it had not been a plan "in the real sense of the term". The so-called draft Plan Frame was formulated in early 1955 with a new and refreshing approach, for which Professor P. C. Mahalanobis, in particular, has been singled out both for praise and for blame. Long-term aims were thoroughly discussed, and it was felt, correctly, that the planning perspective should have "a wide time-horizon" of fifteen or twenty years or more, a sequence indeed of Plans, each dovetailed into the other and subserving a fundamental purpose. Sound foundations had to be laid for a progressive increase in national income and standards of living; the great disparities of

<sup>12</sup> "Economic Weekly", *op. cit.*, P. 1167; cf. S. A. Dange's article in "A Study of Nehru", *op. cit.*, Pp. 298-303.



wealth and income which, apart from their ill effects on our economy were, as Nehru never tired of pointing out, a vulgar taint on our life, had to be lessened drastically; the spectre of unemployment (and its ugly twin-brother, under-employment) needed to be eliminated, in perhaps ten year's time as the propounders of the Plan-Frame talked of a new approach, with emphasis on the rapid development of heavy machine-building, heavy electricals, steel and non-ferrous metals, and energy to supply a powerful foundation for self-sustaining economic growth. Much additional employment was also to be brought about by planned utilization of cottage and village industries, in particular, for the multiplication of consumer goods. There was keener stress than heretofore on the concept of advance in agriculture and industry being interlinked, since without industrial development there could not be the requisite supply of fertilizers, pesticides, farm machinery and equipment, and of course irrigation, drainage and soil improvement, while without agricultural progress the additional food and raw materials essential to industrial advance could not be found. *Pari passu*, the need was now felt and stressed more strongly that facilities for increasing the availability of scientific and technical personnel and stepping up arrangements for their training at different levels of skill should be provided in adequate measure.

To this basic policy Nehru gave powerful support; the change of outlook and of temper could not indeed have taken place without the vision and the enthusiasm of the Prime Minister. He defended it strongly against critics who were either just timorous about things or smelt socialism in the Plan-Frame and clamoured against its size, as it envisaged an outlay in the public sector of about Rs. 4,500 crores in five years, or roughly double the size of the First Plan. If Nehru had not stuck to his guns, the emphasis on the public sector "commanding the strategic heights of the economy" would have vanished. The country must also be grateful for Nehru's zealous espousal of scientific and tech-



nological progress, and it was on account of his personal interest in the matter that a number of national laboratories had come up, very large sums of money were made available for atomic research and development whose results could only be long-term, such things as the decimal coinage and the metric system had been adopted, and greater attention was given and larger amounts allotted for the training and expansion of scientific and technical personnel. At this point, there should be a tribute not only to Jawaharlal's principal advisers but also to himself, in that for the first time there was unequivocal realization that except by radical acceleration of our domestic economy and the construction in quick time of such things as a heavy engineering sector there could be no conceivable salvation for a near-subsistence economy with a stagnant and increasingly doubtful level of exports.

Nevertheless, our fundamental social malady, which the transfer of power in 1947 could not cure, came out again in rashes, so to speak, on our body politic. The plan ran into difficulties that have not since then been effectively tackled. As a leading Opposition spokesman colourfully put it in 1959: "Finance, prices, capital goods, markets, wages, taxes, food employment, all ran into a crisis despite an increase in production and hard work. Opening factories, issuing new permits, controlling the movement in trade and the market, telling banks not to advance money for speculation—all these are being done. Nevertheless, the economy is out of control and out of plan. People attribute this state of affairs to lack of foreign aid, or high wages, high prices, or bad government or corruption or even the will of God!"<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the country had embarked on the Second Plan with high hopes, and with boldness of spirit, also a kind of faith—as Nehru told Parliament in September 1956: "In the final analysis any effort is an act of faith . . . I have faith in the capacity of our people."<sup>14</sup> Courage and hope and self-confidence are qualities that India needed

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 301.

<sup>14</sup> Quotation in Brecher, *op. cit.*, P. 206.



if she was to raise herself from the slough of despair into which for many long years she had fallen. But those who had carped at the plan and wished it ill, the Big Money interests in India, their patrons abroad and their minions at home, in the administration, in public life and in the variegated and long entrenched layers of the private sector, combined to see that those much-needed qualities wilted and withered and were gone. They largely succeeded—a melancholy fact which is a piteous reflection not only on Nehru but on all the rest of us who have wanted to march ahead to a more sensible economy. This has cast a darker shadow today, with Nehru no longer on the scene—for whatever his shortcomings, he was even in his most passive moments, seeking tirelessly to push India forward in the direction of a secular and socialist future and had made a personal commitment to dynamic perspectives which he never ceased to expound and defend before his people.

This is not an essay on the Plans, but perhaps one or two things might be mentioned here. The Second Plan had aimed at an increase of national income by 25 per cent, while the achievement fell just short of half the target. The very latest “quick estimates of National Income for 1963-64” (August 1964) note that during the first three years of the Third Plan, the rise in national income was 9.5 per cent, that is, an annual increase of about 3.1 per cent. The Second Plan, because of its more serious character, was *bête noir* to the champions of free enterprise who dominate Indian economy, and so there was “pruning” and much talk about the “core” (and then the “hard core”!) of the Plan which alone could receive some grudging sustenance. On the eve of the Second Plan, State-owned industry amounted to no more than 5 per cent. of the total, the bulk of the former being assets belonging to railways, ports and irrigation works in which, in any case, profit-hunting capital were not particularly interested. The budget on the eve of the Second Plan, widely advertised as “socialist”, made no serious dent in the preserves of private entrepreneurs, the

bulk of the many new taxes being levied on consumer goods. Bemoaning his lack of financial resources, which being not especially inclined towards socialism he looked for in the wrong places and often did a little too much of sending round the begging bowl abroad, the then Finance Minister complained: "We are riding the tiger of industrialization and can't get off."<sup>15</sup> Not a few, indeed, of the wielders of power in India, whatever they might say in public or to Nehru, wished that we did not try to ride the tiger at all. Luckily, from 1954-55 onwards, India's contacts with the socialist countries, ridiculed in Parliament by responsible ministers as late as 1952-53 as impossible partners in trade and general economic cooperation, helped the country to have a fair push forward in heavy industry which is basic to an independent economy.

As chairman of the National Planning Committee, Nehru had felt that "any effective planning must involve a socialization of the economic structure". The Directive Principles of State Policy included in the Constitution (1950) indicate the broadly egalitarian social and economic goals, by pursuit of which socialism is expected to be achieved in a democratic manner. But these "directive principles" are not mandatory but only recommendatory. Besides, in the body of the Constitution are provisions which can successfully hinder regulatory action by the State on the ground that it violates Fundamental Rights. It is a pity that centrally directed economic planning was not specifically provided for in the clauses of the Constitution, and in spite of occasional amendments certain difficulties remain. It is a pity also that land reforms, which have been the country's most crying need, have only been half-hearted, for while landlordism of the old type has gone and a new structure of owner-cultivators has come into the picture, basic socio-economic improvement has not taken place. In the countryside the vast masses of poor peasants and tenants and land-

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, Pp. 206-07.



less labourers, many of them belonging to traditionally depressed sections of society which should have been the first charge on planning, are yet unable to realize the possibilities of a better life. Large amounts of public money invested in the rural areas have created additional economic opportunities, but they have been grabbed unceremoniously by the richer peasants who have shown a capacity for combined cupidity and cunning which other beneficiaries of acquisitive society can well envy. Nehru's hopes of *Panchayati Raj* operating as a democratic stimulus for the release of creative socio-economic forces in the countryside, and of benefits accruing to the lowest layers of rural society, have perhaps lesser chances of fruition in his absence than if he were alive. Such efforts as the *Bhoodan* (Land-gift) movement of Vinoba Bhave have hardly made a scratch on the surface of the problem. "The situation has been aggravated by the increasing agrarian surplus population and more ravenous land-hunger, as the result of which the system of share-cropping persists and rack-renting, open or clandestine, plays its traditional role."<sup>16</sup>

Nehru had his share of the wish-fulfilling propensities which come natural to one operating, with hope and faith, in the peculiarly difficult and knotty conditions of under-development that is encountered in India. He said once, for instance: "I think nothing has happened in any country in the world during the last few years so big in content and so revolutionary in design as the Community Projects in India. They are changing the face of rural India."<sup>17</sup> There is no questioning the importance of making it possible for democracy to function "at the grass roots." It warms the imagination, this picture of India's myriad villages helping themselves out of a dung-heap (in terms of economic well-being) into cooperative, self-respecting communities subject no longer to the kind of deprivation that

<sup>16</sup> For the preceding paragraph, much help has been drawn from an article by B. N. Ganguli, a leading economist, in "Economic Weekly", *op. cit.*, Pp. 1213-18.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Brecher, *op. cit.*, P. 228.

in the present age none can or should suffer. But official evaluation reports show clearly how there is a long way yet to go, how in spite of nearly the entire country being covered over with community development and national extension blocks, tangible results have been very far from commensurate. It is no wonder that Nehru's own speeches from year to year often carried the refrain of what he had said in 1948: "I must confess to a feeling of exceeding disappointment that all our effort has not yielded better results.<sup>18</sup> I expected much better results, and better results there should have been. . . . I am afraid in our generation (I do not know about succeeding generations) there is going to be little rest or real peace. There are going to be no dividends of leisure and repose brought about for our generation. The prospect before us is work, hard labour. This generation is sentenced to hard labour."<sup>18</sup>

The Nehru approach to planning has been called "the middle way", an attempt to achieve results as rapidly as possible by a combination of the principles of political and economic democracy. Sometimes he would, while thinking aloud as was his wont even in important, formal meetings, make suggestive formulations which would startle many people with a complacent view of things. He was keenly conscious of the difficulties in the way of underdeveloped countries advancing towards socialism. He did not hesitate to aver that parliamentary democracy had to prove itself today by evolving real links with socialism. "I do not see"; he told an audience of parliamentarians some years ago, "what parliamentary democracy has got to do with private enterprise. I do not see any connection between the two, except the connection of past habit and past thinking. I would venture to say that there is going to be an increased conflict between the idea of parliamentary government and full-fledged private enterprise".<sup>19</sup> The wellknown Ameri-

<sup>18</sup> Speech in New Delhi to the Central Board of Irrigation, December 5, 1948.

<sup>19</sup> "Journal of Parliamentary Information" (Lok Sabha, New Delhi), April 1958, P. 2.



can columnist, Walter Lippmann, after his visit to India in 1959, wrote of what he called "the revolutionary objectives of the Third Five Year Plan" that "it would require the organized pressures of a popular movement under government leadership so dynamic and so purposeful that it can inspire people to do voluntarily the kinds of things that in Communist China are done by compulsion".<sup>20</sup> Nehru took serious note of this statement, for whatever one might think of compulsion or cooperation in Communist China, the problem was posed sharply and clearly by a trained foreign observer of high standing. He admitted, in a press interview, that there was much point in Lippmann's view and that the administrative apparatus which was the same as in British days had to be made quick-moving so that the infinitely complicated problems of today could be dealt with.<sup>21</sup>

Some years ago, an eminent Swedish economist, Gunnar Myrdal, calculated that in India the national income per head was perhaps only a third or a fifth of what it was in the highly developed countries of the present day when, a hundred years or more ago, they started on the career of economic advancement. When such is the challenge to India and other underdeveloped countries, how indeed to infuse in our people that essential minimum of concerted determination to forge quickly ahead—for time is of the essence of the matter—and at the same time that minimum of disciplined endeavour without which economic development cannot be achieved? How, indeed, to set alight in Indian hearts what Jawaharlal Nehru once called in a beautiful phrase, "the glow of freedom"? How, indeed, to make them welcome hard work, even, where necessary, some privation, and also some inevitable impingement on purely individual liberties, for without discipline and conscious self-abnegation to make sure of a better future we cannot progress?

By her insensate aggression on India's borders and her

<sup>20</sup> Cf. "Kurukshetra" (Delhi monthly), January 1960, P. 36.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. report in "The Statesman" (Delhi daily), February 23, 1960.

somewhat bizarre ultra-revolutionary posturings in world affairs today, China has got into bad odour, but the fact of her rapid and in many ways spectacular advance cannot be gainsaid. It is easy to ridicule China's record by shouting from the house-tops that India is a free country while China is an armed camp where everybody rises to the call of a bugle and goes, willy-nilly, to work every day of the year. But Nehru himself "was deeply moved by what he saw in China; he was impressed by the energy and discipline of Chinese workers, in contrast to Indians, particularly under the direction of an efficient centralized government which gave China "terrifying strength". This is from no friend to communism, but from Brecher, who adds: "It may well be that subconsciously he (Nehru) was driven to the Left upon his return by the concern that China was winning the crucial contest with India for ideologically uncommitted Asia."<sup>22</sup> If credible evidence from scholars of the standing of Joan Robinson and Charles Bettelheim is borne in mind, it appears that China, for raising herself by her own bootstraps, has turned herself perhaps into a sort of military camp, but she has done so willingly and with gusto as far as the great majority of her people are concerned. It may well be true that in China accelerated development has entailed great tension in the economic system as well as, of course, in individuals. But in any case, can tensions be avoided in a developing economy, when war—no less—is being fought on poverty and the degradation which is poverty's inevitable concomitant? And would the tensions be less if the speed of construction was slowed down and its success rendered doubtful? As the Chinese leader, Liu Shao-chi, is reported to have said: "Everyone must know that a terrible and real tension would exist if over 600 million inhabitants were to live for a long time in poverty and without education." Can that 'tension' be got rid of by a philosophy of poverty which *Sarvodaya* theorists some-

<sup>22</sup> Brecher, *op. cit.*, P. 203.



times propound, or a philosophy of *laissez faire* which Nehru so discerningly pronounced to be in conflict today with the ideas and practice of truly free government?<sup>22</sup>

It must have been because he gave his mind to present and potential tensions in India that Nehru stressed so much, even on the eve of his death, the need for making the Third and the Fourth Plans bold enough to take the country to the stage of self-generating growth at least by the middle of the Fifth Plan period. This, he felt, was essential, especially because once that stage was reached the country's economy would have been well enough geared to face up to any political storms or instability that might arise in future. So he wanted the Fourth Plan period to be carefully utilized in order to consolidate such strength as could make the economy self-generating and impart to it the necessary momentum to tide over troubled periods. His thinking was a complete contrast to that of some among his successors who in their cautious, fumbling, inherently *status quo* approach seem frightened by the phenomenon of inflation caused mainly by a sharp upswing of defence spending and the depredations of 'black' money into schemes of suspending projects and patching up what is termed a programme of 'consolidation'. This is to be done even at the risk of attaining the direction and the spirit in which the country's economic development has been geared and of greater reliance on foreign assistance. This latter tendency is seen today in spite of the fact that the proposals of the Perspective Planning Division for the Fourth Five Year Plan were approved in principle at the last meeting of the Planning Commission which Nehru attended, proposals which appear to be on the way to being pigeon-holed or deleteriously altered. In many conservative voices were raised, in view of the menacing attitude of China, to subordinate the needs of development to those of defence. It was a powerful argument, augmented in strength by the patri-

<sup>22</sup> Cf. H. Mukerjee, 'India and Parliament', Pp. 148-50.



otism so genuinely roused at the time. But Nehru stood up to the challenge and convinced the country that defence and development could only go hand in hand together. He is no longer on the scene, and certain inevitable stresses and strains in the economy are already being made arguments, not in so many words but virtually, for a change of direction.

No doubt, Nehru himself was often a pragmatist, but in his case it was a virile and positive pragmatism. He was ready, when needed, for compromises, but he would seek to keep the basic purposes unchanged and would adjust from time to time the manner of achieving them. He brought to the service of his country a life-force that was, deep down in itself, truly tempestuous, though often it appeared calm on a surface where compromises had been assimilated. With him pragmatism was a method and not a policy in itself. But even when his ashes are hardly cold and from his urn he should rule Indian planning, "it is as a policy that (pragmatism) now being sold."<sup>24</sup>

That this could happen even if the trend comes to be defeated, is itself a reflection on Nehru's contribution to Indian planning. It was indeed a magnificent contribution. Without disrespect to worthy men like Visvesaraya it is right and proper to say that he initiated, and by continuous iteration and stress, sustained the thinking on planning in India. Through numberless speeches to the public and by close participation in the variegated work of the Planning Commission and auxiliary bodies he exercised a profound educative influence and made planning an instrument of national policy on a bigger scale than in any country outside the communist world. He alone was responsible for persuading an organization like the Indian National Congress to accept for its goal socialism as the happy consummation of economic planning. Always he was eager to link planning with purpose, to rouse in his people, however slowly, "a sense of partnership in a great adventure". But



the very fact of his acute sensitivity somehow resulted in a weakening of the firmness of his will. He could neither successfully organize nor institutionalize the determination of his people to rouse themselves, and with a civilized faith in discussion preceding decision never built up even a team of his own. He would have wonderful dialogues with his people but working to the bone himself, he would not draw them tightly into disciplined and dedicated work. He could throw up a grand idea from time to time but he could not evolve and operate a strategy of social change.

Between the conception  
And the creation  
Between the emotion  
And the response  
Falls the shadow.

## CHAPTER X.

### TOWARDS SOCIALISM?

In a letter to Gandhi (August 13, 1934), expressive of deep melancholy and a certain exasperation, Jawaharlal spoke of himself, isolated and lonely in an organization which had, called off the Civil Disobedience movement, as "a square peg in a round hole or a bubble of conceit thrown about hither and thither on an ocean which spurned me". He was angry with a resolution of the Congress Working Committee on the subject of socialism which "showed such an astounding ignorance of the elements of socialism that it was painful to read it and to realize that it might be read outside India". The word 'socialism', he pursued, had "a clearly defined meaning in the English language, in a totally different sense," and if there was to be "commerce of ideas" should be precisely meant. "A person", he added, "who declares himself to be an engine-driver and then that his engine is of wood and is drawn by bullocks is misusing the word engine-driving".

On this point Gandhi's reply was characteristic. Well aware of the ways of Anglo-Saxon lexicography, he had a gentle dig at his favourite disciple, with a subtle irony that was so often the secret of his charm: "I have looked up the dictionary meaning of socialism. It takes me no further than where I was before I read the definition. What will you have me to read to know its full content?" (August 17, 1934).<sup>1</sup>

Dictionaries are not exactly the repository of information about a vital and dynamic thing like socialism, but Gandhi's affectionate fling at Jawaharlal had a real relevance. "I must frankly confess", Jawaharlal had said from the president's chair at the Lahore Congress, some four years before



this correspondence, "that I am a Socialist and a Republican", but it was never possible, either then or later, to pin him down to concrete envisagement of programmes for the realization of socialism. When in early 1939, Subhas Chandra Bose, in the fiery noon of his Indian career, twitted Nehru for his socialism being vague and inchoate and for him being no more than an "individualist", he answered back with a kind of wistful grace: "Am I a socialist or an individualist? Is there a necessary contradiction in the two terms? . . . . I suppose I am temperamentally and by training an individualist, and intellectually a socialist . . . . I hope that socialism does not kill or suppress individuality ; indeed I am attracted to it because it will release innumerable individuals from economic and cultural bondage." It was the voice of a man, civilized and deeply sensitive, but hardly suited to the rough and tumble of the kind of fight which had to be fought if India was to make the grade and move ahead towards socialism, incapable of the ruthlessness which could not be escaped in socio-economic transformations. This peculiar and often fascinating dichotomy in his role will be seen over and over again throughout his career.

As a young man in England, he had only slightly, diletante fashion and by no means with conviction, imbibed a Fabian view of socialism. "I was a pure nationalist", he wrote of the period round about 1917 when he was making a not very willing entry into political life, "my vague socialist ideas of college days having sunk into the background. . . . They were vague ideas, more humanitarian and utopian than scientific".<sup>2</sup> It was not before the middle 'twenties (when he was about thirty-five) that he began to be really drawn towards socialism. His "wanderings among the Kisans" in 1920-21 "lifted the veil and disclosed a fundamental aspect of the Indian problem to which nationalists had hardly paid any attention."<sup>3</sup> He wrote of his meetings with "crowds of simple folk", with "no posing about them, no vulgarity", as

<sup>2</sup> "An Autobiography", P. 85.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Pp. 56-63.

in the case of many who thought themselves "their betters", did a lot of "posing" and made "flamboyant" speeches. These people, he wrote, "were dull certainly, uninteresting individually, but in the mass they produced a feeling of overwhelming pity and a sense of ever-impending tragedy."<sup>4</sup> Evidently, Jawaharlal was still almost in the stage, where the writer Galsworthy was, when G. K. Chesterton chastised him: "He (Galsworthy) could give a man his heart but not his hand," adding with vitriol that was undeserved, that "the load of this loveless pity was worse than the ancient wrongs." Jawaharlal's pity was never loveless, but of course it took him some time before love could really be said to be the fulfilling of the law of his life, before he could say of himself with the simple beauty of truth: "If any people choose to think of me, then I should like them to say—this was the man who, with all his mind and heart, loved India and the Indian people. And they in turn were indulgent to him and gave him of their love most abundantly and extravagantly."<sup>5</sup>

In 1926-27, Jawaharlal spent in Europe, as noted earlier, what was for one so active a quiet interlude in his life, entering into new experiences, reading a great deal of literature not easily available at home, meeting savants and revolutionaries, reflecting—a period, indeed, of preparation, without his knowing it, for the role he was to play when back home in India. This was the time when he attended in Brussels the inaugural meeting of the League against Imperialism and was elected to its executive committee. About this organization he wrote later: "In 1931, because of my part in the Delhi Truce between the Congress and the Government of India, it grew exceedingly angry with me, and excommunicated me with bell, book and candle—or to be more accurate, expelled me by some kind of a resolution. I must confess that it had great provocation, but it might



have given me some chance of explaining my position".<sup>6</sup> This observation, quietly worded, was characteristic; it was at Brussels that he was attracted towards communism, especially as he noted "tremendous changes taking place in Russia," but he was already somewhat repelled by the aggressiveness and intolerance of communists whom he had encountered. What his biographer Brecher calls his "split mentality to communism" perhaps dated back to this period.

He was above the kind of prejudice against communism which a smaller man would certainly have grown, and after a brief visit to Moscow in November 1927—a time, it should be remembered, of great stress and even privation for the Soviet people—he did not hesitate to write about the new life that was being built by people who had only recently been disunited and demoralized but had learnt, under Lenin's guidance, to acquire "energy and determination and the strength to endure and suffer for a cause." Apart from the socio-economic and cultural aspects of the Soviet effort, he had the perspicacity to note, some twenty years before independence, that Russia was in any case India's neighbour and whether she was friendly or "a thorn in our side", it was essential for us "to know her and understand her and shape our policy accordingly." Even his father, Motilal, whose background was entirely different and to whom socialism was an unfamiliar and an alien concept, "was definitely impressed by what he saw in Moscow."<sup>7</sup> It is indeed, noteworthy that before communism in Russia had passed its fiery ordeal, when it was thought of, even by many of its sympathizers, as an "experiment" which might just as well fail as succeed, when it was far indeed from the affluent society that the Soviets have since created, Jawaharlal Nehru felt and expressed his kinship for the communist ideal in a manner that led Brecher to call it rather peevishly an "infatuation" "which lingered on for at least twenty years".<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> "An Autobiography", P. 164.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 165; cf. J. Nehru, "Soviet Russia" (1928), a rare book now, but well worth reading.

<sup>8</sup> Brecher, *op. cit.*, P. 57.

It has been pointed out, suggestively, that perhaps the "roots" of Nehru's socialism "lay more in concern for peace and internationalism than in anger against exploitation, that it was the violence and vulgarity of capitalism that repelled him more than its inequity or inefficiency." He said himself that as his colleagues in the Congress thought in no other terms than those of narrow nationalism he had wanted to acquaint them with the ideology of socialism. He was convinced that a world order was what humanity needed and without a change-over from the anarchy of sovereign states, almost inevitably turning in a vicious circle of fear and mutual conflict of interest, of avarice and acquisitiveness, such a world order would not emerge. This implied the elimination of the capitalist system, and in its place an entirely different system "whereby the earth and its fruits will be exploited for the benefit of all members of the community in proportion to the service they render to it and not according to the accident of private property." Nehru could envisage this transformation only in terms of Marx's materialist interpretation of history, even if he was not entirely sure of the theory of value being indispensable to the structure of Marx's thought. He felt deep admiration, no doubt, for the massive intellectual construction of Marxism and its attempt at scientific theory, but he was drawn towards it a great deal more on account of its historical approach and its constantly underlying passion for social justice.

In spite, however, of certain reservations about the theory and practice of Marxism, he was clear in his own mind, at least during the 'thirties about his acceptance of the fundamentals of socialism. He was not afraid of insisting that socialism called for a revolutionary, and often violent, break away from the past, that "reformism was an impossible solution of any vital problem at a critical moment when the basic structure had to be changed, and however slow the progress might be, the initial step must be a complete break



with the existing order." He did not hesitate to aver that while much private initiative could be left to "some matters, cultural etc.", "in all that counts, in a material sense, nationalization of the instruments of production and distribution seems to be inevitable," and that while "there may be half-way houses to it, one can hardly have two contradictory and conflicting processes going on side by side." His quotation from Lloyd George can, in this context, be reiterated: "There is no greater mistake than to leap the abyss in two jumps."<sup>10</sup>

He was not unaware of the "excesses" of Communism in practice in the Soviet Union, but for a time when the menace of fascism overshadowed every other thing, he seemed to have been almost prepared to turn a blind eye in that direction. "I do believe", he wrote, "that fundamentally the choice before the world today is between some form of Communism and some form of fascism, and I am all for the former, that is, Communism. There is no middle road . . . . and I choose the Communist idea . . . . I think that these methods will have to adapt themselves to changing conditions and may vary in different countries."<sup>11</sup> In 1933-34 he collected his thoughts in a brochure "Whither India?", which essayed this adaptation. It has become a landmark, for it placed socialism, as it were, firmly on India's political map. Orthodox communists thought it was good as far as it went but did not go far enough. It did go far enough, however, to create a serious flutter in Congress dovecotes and a much bigger stir in the country. If it did not satisfy doctrinal orthodoxy it helped, more than anything in India at that time, to change a trend into a movement.

In his autobiography, there are beautiful, though often ambivalent, passages about his notions regarding communism. His sympathies, he said, were "entirely with communism" as against fascism, but he was "very far from being"

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 1221: "A Bunch of Old Letters", Pp. 140-41.

<sup>11</sup> Brecher, *op. cit.*, Pp. 79-80; cf. "Autobiography", P. 591.

a communist", with his roots "still perhaps partly in the nineteenth century", his "bourgeois background "which was "naturally a source of irritation to many communists", and his feeling for "the humanist liberal tradition". With disarming irony, he wrote: "Communists have called me a petty *bourgeois* with perfect justification. Perhaps they might label me now as one of the 'repentant bourgeoisie'." Sometimes, he would lash out at people with a *status quo* type of mind: "They neither dream nor do they act. They have no understanding of human convulsions like the Great French Revolution or the Russian Revolution. The complex, shifty and cruel eruptions of human desires, long suppressed, frighten them. For them the Bastille has not fallen." He wrote how his "socialist propaganda upset even some" of his colleagues among Congress leaders, how Gandhi would sometimes call himself a socialist, to be followed likewise by a number of prominent Congressmen mouthing "a kind of muddled humanitarianism", but that their heart was set against socialism even if their head might not always be so.<sup>12</sup> He had no patience, however, with many communists who, he thought, gave absurdly over-simple generalizations about the influence of Big Money interests on the Congress leadership and especially on Gandhi; they had developed, he wrote, "a peculiar method of irritating others." Characteristically, however, he added: "They are a sorely tried people, and outside the Soviet Union, they have to contend with enormous difficulties. I have always admired their great courage and capacity for sacrifice. They suffer greatly, as unhappily untold millions suffer in various ways, but not blindly before a malign and all-powerful fate. They suffer, as human beings, and there is a tragic nobility about such suffering." One wonders if communism and communists have ever had a finer tribute than when this great man whom they often irritated wrote of Lenin, as the greatest of communists, having an "organic sense of life"

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Pp. 477, 515-16, 529, 591.



and of "marching step by step with history," and added: "To a small extent every communist, who has understood the philosophy of his movement, has it."<sup>13</sup>

Even with his capacity for historic vision, Jawaharlal was too often unsure about action, and doubtful and hesitant about the price likely to have to be paid for it. Thus he would lapse into melancholy and a phase of passivity and indecision, unable to make up his mind about taking a tide at the flood. Suddenly, for example, after lauding the approach of Marxism and its attitude to action, he would ruminate gloomily: "Coming back to India, communism and socialism seem a far cry, unless the rush of events force the pace here. We have to deal not with communism but, with the addition of an extra syllable, with communalism. And communally India is in a dark age."<sup>14</sup> It is to be noted that he would wistfully write of "the rush of events" forcing the pace, but he would not, for himself, "force the issue", when as a leader second only to Gandhi in mass appeal he should have had confidence enough in himself to do so when it was felt to be necessary. Thus his speech at the Lucknow Congress (1936) is full of wonderful affirmations about socialism—"the only key to the solution of the world's problems and of India's problems", there being "no way of ending the poverty, the vast unemployment, the degradation and the subjection of the Indian people except through socialism". He said he meant socialism "not in a vague humanitarian way but in the scientific, economic sense", "not merely an economic doctrine which I favour", but "a vital creed which I hold with all my head and heart". He declared he wanted Indian independence not merely because he hated "alien domination", but "even more because for me it is the inevitable step to social and economic changes." But the majority in the Congress being of a different view, he had "no desire to force the issue". Forcing the issue before the time was ripe would of course be folly, but

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Pp. 591-92.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 593.

Jawaharlal appeared ready to beat a retreat even before mustering his forces to take the field. At the next session of the Congress in Faizpur, he urged his people "to move with new desires", so that "this mad world system" should go, and to take a firm stand on that account: "the middle groups fade out, or ghost-like, they flit about, unreal, disillusioned, self-tortured, ever-doubting".<sup>15</sup> Whether it was Gandhi's spell or his own inner voice, Jawaharlal remained himself, as it were, in the middle, "between two fires" where, as he quoted the poet's words, "only ghosts can live", not unsure about the side he had chosen but unsure about what exactly to do in regard to the choice. Like a tortured Kafka in politics, he thought he could see the way but on looking again saw it was only wavering.

It needs to be stressed, however, that whatever his inhibitions and hesitations in the sphere of practice, there was nothing evasive or half-hearted in his concept of socialism. Always he objected to dogma, but so did Marx who once said: "Thank God, I am not a Marxist!", and also Lenin who stressed that revolutionary theory was "no dogma, but a guide to action", or Stalin, a great deal more rigid in his ways, who spoke of "creative Marxism" as opposed to the dogmatic, "Talmudist" variety. This is not to equate them all, which would be absurd, but only to point out that in his horror of dogma Jawaharlal could claim to be in unexceptionable company. As noted a little earlier, even while repudiating a doctrinaire approach, he came very near accepting wholesale Marx's definition of socialism as "nationalization of the means of production, distribution and exchange". In his autobiography, he spoke of "a kind of muddled humanitarianism" which some of his Congress colleagues thought was socialism, and with a touch almost of malice quoted two statements, one by the British Labour leader, Ramsay MacDonald and another by Sardar Patel (who wrote, it seems: "True socialism lies in the develop-



ment of village industries") as illustrative of his point. Later, there crept into his thinking a sort of vagueness, but it had reasons, whether right or wrong is another matter. It may be that he would have seconded a definition which Sidney Webb gave of socialism at one time and which could mean almost anything: "The economic side of the democratic ideal". Jawaharlal's concern was, at bottom, for "the good society"—an ethical view of socialism which can be pooh-poohed only by those who are blind to the quickly changing social phenomena of the mid-twentieth century. Perhaps it was not a bad thing that Jawaharlal brought into his thinking, which was always seriously addressed to his people, a certain amount of "judicious irreverence" towards "sanctified formulae", but basically he knew what was what, or he could not have approvingly quoted Tawney: "Onions can be eaten leaf by leaf, but you cannot skin a live tiger paw by paw ; visisection is its trade, and it does the skimming first."<sup>16</sup>

When India became independent and Jawaharlal found himself almost automatically at the helm, it was natural to expect that economic policy would be formulated with the aim of socialism in view, for to socialism, though vaguely and in the abstract, even Gandhi had paid his homage, and Jawaharlal had made himself *bête noir* to many people on account of his fervid espousal of the idea. What happened, however, was very different ; indeed, it had been left to the Muslim League leader in the Interim Government (1946-47), Liaquat Ali Khan, to bring forward a Budget which horrified Vallabhbhai Patel and the conservative (ironically, Congress) representatives in the Cabinet as being too onerous for the richer sections and had to be drastically altered. Even after the redoubtable Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was dead, and his two most powerful supporters, Rajendra Prasad and C. Rajagopalachari had left the arena, the former on account of elevation to the Presidentship of the Indian Union and the

<sup>16</sup> "An Autobiography". Pp. 422, 515, 527.

latter moving out of the Congress company to find his moorings subsequently in the *Swatantra* (laissez-faire) party, Jawaharlal, rather alone in his glory and with none to dispute his pre-eminence, did not or could not move very visibly towards the Left. There is neither in the Constitution of 1950 nor in the First Five Year Plan (1951-56) any reference, except by implication and interpretation, to the socialist ideal. Towards the close of 1954 a resolution in Parliament propounded the goal of socialism, and since then, between the sessions of the Congress at Avadi (1955) and Bhuvaneshwar (1964), and in numberless public statements socialism was endlessly talked about. But as an acute observer noted, "the frequency with which the ideal has been reiterated is matched only by the variety of meanings assigned to it—or, more revealingly, by the meaning sought to be withheld from it."<sup>17</sup>

These were years when, quite apart from what was happening to China after revolution (1949) had triumphed there, socialism, howsoever diluted, appeared to be going ahead, though in somewhat disparate ways, in countries like Burma and Indonesia and even Ceylon and Egypt. Compared to these countries, the situation in India cannot be said to have been particularly unpropitious for socialism, unless it is held that parliamentary institutions were necessarily allergic to social reconstruction, a view which Jawaharlal, as we have seen before, expressly repudiated. Perhaps, however, the gruelling experiences which Jawaharlal went through, in 1946-48, induced in him a kind of timorousness, made him think of going ahead rapidly in the direction of socialism more of a gamble with the people's fate than he was prepared ever to undertake, and fortified his natural aversion to the sort of ruthless determination called for by period of qualitative change in socio-economic patterns. Perhaps he discovered that from the civilized heights where he had built his mind's tabernacle he had,

<sup>17</sup> "Economic Weekly" article on "The Socialist Legacy", Pp. 4219-25.



without objective warrant, underrated such things as religion and caste in the Indian scheme of things and so found himself floundering and worried about *terra firma*. "Here was not one society divided into simple Marxist categories such as of landlords, peasants and labourers but a conglomeration of small pre-capitalist societies divided further by various forms of tribal and other totems and taboos, extremely conscious of their separateness, and only very loosely linked together by economic and other interests."<sup>18</sup> Nehru's constant aversion towards violence, even as he knew that in class society violence of the utterest sort was always taking place and that revolutions necessarily extracted a certain price that normally one does not wish to have to pay, must have warned him away from whatever seemed to him to imply serious risks. He had seen and learnt so much of insensate violence, vulgarity and chaos and of man's infinite capacity for inhumanity towards fellow-men, that he fought shy of anything which might conceivably plunge the country into confusion and avoidable bloodshed and the consequential dangers that might even have meant the forfeiture of newly won freedom. "It was easy enough to extol the violence of socialism as being less offensive than the violence of fascism or capitalism in theory, particularly before the War and Partition. But after the ghastly shame of partition riots and the assassination of the Mahatma, it was not possible to countenance violence, much less to unleash it with a fine sense of calculation about the probable sum-total of evil along alternative routes."<sup>19</sup> Besides, having now the unaccustomed responsibility of running a bruised and battered old country, faced hourly with the arduous worries of administration, realizing that to propound radical remedies was very different from their application in conditions that seemed almost insolubly difficult, and mindful in such peculiar circumstances of having to placate, as far as possible, powerful and

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 1232 ; article by K. N. Raj, whose contribution is among the most notable in this rich and rewarding issue of the journal.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 1225.



entrenched interests at home and abroad, Nehru was perhaps driven to place something like the black-out blinds, familiar in war-time, on the lamps of socialism. Maybe it was the result of socialism being with him, as it often is with many of his left-wing critics also, a matter of emotion and of sensibility rather than of wholehogging conviction.

With his lively sense of history, Nehru was aware that "the rush of external events" could force the pace even in immemorial India ; sometimes, especially in the 'thirties, he had appeared inclined towards welcoming such an event if it could take place. After independence, when a sort of unwanted sobriety seemed foisted on him and with a natural resilience he took it in his stride, he watched, without much enthusiasm and perhaps with some anxiety, the big change in China, and to a lesser extent, in South-east Asia. He was unsure of the nature of the impact and its consequences, if India was to have taste of it, and he decided on caution. He knew it was futile and vulgar to try, Canute-like, to order the waves back ; he could never bring himself, for example, to join the moral-cum-political posturings against the menace of Communism, which, since Winston Churchill spoke at Fulton, Missouri (1946) and the Marshal Plan, the Truman Doctrine and such contrivances made their appearance, must have drawn many of his colleagues in the party and the government. He preferred, perhaps, a more reputable resolve, namely, peacefully but by positive and progressive steps to achieve the transition to a saner society, avoiding the stern, polarization of conflicting forces and softening it wherever possible by a certain gentleness of approach. And he would justify himself to himself and to his people, with whom he was holding incessant converse, by such ruminations as he had noted much earlier in his autobiography: "Life and politics are always too complex for us always to think in straight lines."

• There does not seem to have been in India, more of revolutionary fervour in 1954-55 than in 1948-50, and at least one keen observer has sought to discover the reasons



why Nehru revived the concept of socialism as India's objective, both in Parliament and in his own Congress Party. Perhaps, he speculates, "the revival was for old time's sake." More seriously, it was an aspect of foreign rather than of home policy, a weapon of alliance with Afro-Asian nations emerging into freedom and finding a movement towards socialism inescapable, a weapon also of attracting friendship and assistance from socialist countries as a foil against the pressures, the vagaries and the unspoken but constant insolence of "the aid-giving West". Even more probably, Nehru intended to make sure that Indian society, weighed down by age and the plethora of sectional and vested interests, did not veer definitively towards reaction, thereby jeopardising its future and nullifying a role it had begun to play as "an honest broker", entitled to his occasional commission, between the capitalist and communist "camps". Just as in foreign policy he stressed the virtues of co-operative co-existence in a world divided into competitive, and on occasion warring blocs, Nehru would have at home the private sector flourishing as well as socialism slowly but surely transforming the character of the economy.<sup>20</sup> There was in this frame of mind an undoubtedly wish-fulfilling propensity, an inability fairly and squarely to grapple with concrete problems, even a lack of a willingness to do so. This made him speak, from time to time, words that sounded brave but were nearly hollow of content. In April 1956, addressing the All India Manufacturers' Organization,<sup>21</sup> he was glad that his audience of capitalists agreed with the Avadi declaration of "a socialistic pattern of society" and added in his usual ambivalent strain: "Some people seem to make fine distinctions among socialistic pattern, socialist pattern and socialism. They are all exactly the same thing without the slightest difference. But what they are is not such a very easy thing to define. . . . Doctrinaire thinking leads to rigidity . . . leaves us high and dry. This should not mean that we think of a socialist pattern of

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, Pp. 1225, 1232.

<sup>21</sup> "India's Spokesman", ed. C. D. Narasimharajah, Pp. 125-31.



society in some flabby, goody-goody way, though there are many . . . who think that by a expression of goodwill to all and sundry they have done their duty." This extract may be a bad example, but it is a not unfair sample of Nehru's talks on socialism, which were often "flabby, goody-goody", because his sensibilities wanted something which his head could not quite work out and which required in practice, life being what it is, measures which he did not have the stomach for.

Late in 1936, before a small and intimate audience in Allahabad, Nehru gave a simple picture (which has stuck in the present writer's memory) about the interrelation between the fight for national independence and for socialism. It was not, he said, as if one reaches for one *laddoo*, eats it and stretches his hands for another ; one has to try to grab both at the same time and the sequence of events would fall naturally into place! While his understanding was clear, however, he hesitated in the sphere of action which fell short, nearly always, of what was wanted. Before freedom came, he would not, he used to say, "force the issue" and risk division in the National Front. After freedom, also, he has known and felt, with constant anguish, the enormous price having hourly to be paid for the maintenance of the *status quo* of exploitation, but he shrank always from the decision of taking a decisive plunge for he never could be sure, with his kind of sensibility and humane-ness, that the price of change was not too heavy. Thus, in the Nehru era, there has taken place a substantial shift towards public ownership of the means of production in the sphere of basic industries, but with private property in land, buildings, commerce, small industry and also a major part of large industry comprising something like a "vast ocean", the norm of social behaviour and the character of the economy continues to be dominated by acquisitiveness and the power of Big Money. Nehru used to envisage the public sector commanding the strategic heights of the economy, even as it co-existed with a flourishing and efficient private sector, but while the future of the public sector is perhaps reasonably assured, there



appear to be few real guarantees of its pre-eminence. For its finance, public sector industries rely very largely on foreign assistance and also on mobilizing voluntary savings at home, rather than on tax surpluses or their own profits or on confiscation (with or without compensation). Thus its future remains uncertain and being almost entirely administered in the old bureaucratic manner, its character indicates no change in quality. There is an "uneasy coalition" between capitalist and quasi-socialist forms, the former unquestionably predominating. In the words of the perceptive critic previously referred to in these pages: "One can say, if one is so inclined that socialism has come to stay in India, but so has capitalism."<sup>22</sup>

What continues to be important is that Nehru, by unceasing if not always clear and consistent iteration, got his country committed to the objective of socialism and economic self-reliance. It could never have been a simple operation to drag a huge, unwieldy and amorphous body like the Congress along the path, if not plainly of socialism, but of progress and modernization. The steps along this path are sometimes muddled but always, even in deviation, rather remarkable. The Avadi Resolution (1955) defined the objective of the Congress to be "the establishment of a socialistic pattern of society, where the principal means of production are under social ownership or control, production is progressively speeded up and there is equitable distribution of national wealth." At Bhuvaneshwar, in January 1964, the landmark was the incorporation in the Congress constitution of "a socialist state" as its specific objective, while the resolution spoke, a trifle vaguely, of "a revolution in economic and social relationships in Indian society" and the quest for socialism "based on democracy, dignity of the human individual and social justice." This meeting witnessed a generous proliferation of socialist semantics but neither its resolutions nor its other documents and speeches presented an intellectual

<sup>22</sup>"Economic Weekly", *op. cit.*, P. 1225.

doctrine or a programme of action—in sum, neither an ideology nor an articulate social philosophy which could give a specific direction or sense of purpose to social and economic activity. A kind of all-things-to-all-men approach vitiates this variety of “socialism”, which becomes “a short-term expression for all desirable ends”, ignoring both the instruments of change and all essential institutional arrangements. Almost it emerges “as a rather weak and hollow reed in which one can blow almost any kind of music.”<sup>23</sup> The Nehru genius for eclecticism (aptly, perhaps, in the Indian tradition) and for reconciling, through compromises and concessions, contradictory modes of thought and action was seen in varying shades during this whole process.

At the all India Congress Committee meeting at Jaipur (November 1963), Nehru, in a melancholy mood, sounded a warning to his own party. If a programme for socialism was not evolved and implemented immediately, he feared that “ten or fifteen years hence our people may lose faith in peaceful means and the problem may get more complicated.” Indeed, throughout 1963, when on account of China’s aggression he was calling upon the country to perform the twin tasks of defence and development, Nehru appeared worried about the future and intent on formulating more purposeful programmes. The Bhuvaneshwar declaration, howsoever wordy and hedged with hesitancies, was an indication of his growing impatience with the pace and quality of advance that Indian planning had shown. And it was at Bhuvaneshwar itself that his physical frame got sharp notice that his life was ebbing away.

Jawaharlal Nehru died not very long after the shock that came from China had put an end to the comparatively genteel and reasonably carefree existence which India under his leadership had begun to take for granted—a way of life where it seemed as if socialism, with individual liberties and a democratic framework unimpaired, could be slowly and in

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, Pp. 1223-25, 1236.



the long run surely achieved. If he lived ten years longer, and in full possession of his powers, this shock might have brought out in him traits of which he had shown few signs so far. Perhaps he was in any case "more of a poet than a taskmaster", that "when he talked of his vision of an impeccably planned and prosperous India, it was dream and poetry moulded together", but that "unfortunately, for ushering both socialism and industrialisation, lyrical warblings are no substitute for hard-core thinking and organization of necessary but unpleasant measures."<sup>24</sup> Perhaps with all his understanding, he had a naïve, unspoken belief that a mixed body, with landlords and capitalists pulling the strings, could bring about a socialist society, only provided it had the saving virtue of democracy, and that civil servants, apprised of targets, would get going at once with the job of arranging the requisite supply of heavy industry, power, foodgrains and all else. Perhaps it was with the desire of minimising the burden of suffering on our people that he refused to call upon them to clench their teeth and by prodigious effort raise domestic savings and accumulate capital necessary for advance, but in the result our people have probably suffered no less than they would have done if that effort were made. Perhaps the man who had spoken of "basic laws and powers" essential for a socialist structure, whose object was "not to deprive but to provide, and to change the present scarcity to future abundance" could not muster the strength, or the stomach, to get the "basic laws" adopted and to see that the country did generate the "basic powers" and remove the "major obstructions" in the way of the new, non-acquisitive society. Perhaps Jawaharlal had in him too much of the artist, and in spite of his involvement with real life also something of a romantic visionary, with a lofty remoteness from unpleasant necessities and an attraction towards what was elegant and orderly, and Gandhi's influence worked into his composition a revulsion from violence and all ruthless.

<sup>24</sup> Article by A. M. in *Ibid.*, P. 1197.



ness, which heightened his refinement but incapacitated him from being the engineer of the social reconstruction which he fondly thought he cared for most deeply.

More than any one man in India, Jawaharlal had worked for the idea of a planned economy. More than any one man, he laboured to bring Congress round to the recognition, perhaps semi-reluctant, of a socialist society as India's goal. More than any one man, he plumped for active friendship and co-operation with the socialist third of the world. But with something of the spirit of 19th century Utopianism, he yearned for the price of revolution being somehow drastically minimised. He could have said, with a laugh, what Bernard Shaw once said in a talk to the Fabian Society: "I am impatient for the revolution, I shall be jolly happy if the revolution comes tomorrow. But being an average coward, I would like you to make the revolution in as gentlemanly a manner as possible."

However one might regret Jawaharlal's inability to ride the waves of social revolution, it would be churlish and wrong to ridicule it. Jawaharlal and his like are brave people, ready to suffer and offer their all to the right cause. But they shrink from action, as they think of the massive price involved in basic changes. There is some nobility even in such indecision, which one must learn to understand if not to approve. Can it also be forgotten that recent revelations about excesses and even crimes in the process of building and protecting socialism have roused in many minds a doubt, that perhaps even the most worthwhile thing in social organization may not be worth the price that, historically speaking, appears to have to be paid for it? Can it be that sustenance for a new life will have to be drawn from the grass roots of goodness, of simple love and honour and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice? A tall order this, surely, and in an unquiet world where masses of men still go hungry and unfree and social contradictions remain unresolved. But maybe, to some people, Jawaharlal among them, such thoughts do come, and they must not be despised. Let it be remembered also



that two World Wars and a succession of revolutions, national-liberation as well as socialist, have created a context of things where in certain conceivable circumstances revolutionary change seems likely without recourse to classical-type revolutions with their accompaniment of a certain measure of violence. In such a situation, the approach towards socialism of such men as Nehru can, with sympathy and determined effort, be concretised.<sup>25</sup>

Jawaharlal had a special feeling about technological progress which he tended sometimes to judge in isolation from its social context. He knew that co-existence would be easy and not unpleasant, instead of being thorny and constantly irritating, if patterns and standards of living were similar or nearly so. Thus he thought that it would be on this account for the USA and the USSR to veer into closer relations and even accord, forgetting the difference in quality between the social system of the two countries, the former aiming at ever greater affluence and the latter, being socialist, aiming at non-acquisitiveness rather than affluence. Nehru was no theorist, but he was a thinker all along the line. It was a pity that the so-called requirements of practicality, which imposed themselves on him as the head of a peculiarly slow-moving administration, insensibly coloured his thinking, and in the sphere of action he was too often weighed down by what was "sufficient unto the day". That he could not resolve the dichotomy was due partly no doubt to his own make-up but also to the special exigencies of a situation where, theoretically speaking, he had to eke out a hand-to-mouth existence. Such enforced pragmatism took the shine out of the socialist principles which he had brilliantly formulated so often.

Perhaps Jawaharlal, like the hero in one of Strindberg's plays, might have exclaimed: "It was not victory I wanted—it was the battle." As he himself wrote in his autobiography: "The distant mountains seem easy of access and

climbing, the top beckons, but as one approaches, difficulties appear and the higher one goes the more laborious becomes the journey and the summit recedes into the clouds. Yet the climbing is worth the effort and has its own joy and satisfaction. Perhaps it is the struggle which gives value to life, not so much the ultimate result. Often it is difficult to know which is the right path ; it is easier sometimes to know what is not right, and to avoid that is something after all." To one who could feel and write such lines, much may be forgiven, even the inability to guide his old country, sternly and with a single mind, in the direction of socialism.



## CHAPTER XI

### INDIA'S "MIDDLE WAY"

Except for a handful of critics who have professed to see nothing good in Nehru's foreign policy,<sup>1</sup> no one in India grudged him the honour of having directed the country's external affairs since independence in a manner that has earned the world's respect. For a country that was unfree till some seventeen years ago and is weighted down still by numberless problems, this has indeed been a proud feat. And Nehru's illustrious position in the life of India and of the world was due perhaps more to this than any other item in the inventory of his achievements.

It was entirely in the fitness of things that Jawaharlal Nehru, as India's first Prime Minister, took over also the portfolio of external affairs. To him, more than to any one man, did the Congress in pre-independence days owe its international orientation. He knew better than any other Congress leader that India was no anchorite peninsula, outside of the stream of world events and immune from the winds that blow abroad. And more than some whole-hogging nationalists, whose single-track anti-imperialism would sometimes drive them to mistaken international calculations, he knew which way the path of freedom and progress lay.<sup>2</sup>

At least since the Madras Congress session of 1927, which condemned the use by Britain of Indian armed police and military forces against the revolution in China, and particularly in cities like Shanghai, it was Nehru who gave the lead in such matters. When in 1932 he wrote "Whither India?", or in 1936 gave his celebrated presidential address

<sup>1</sup> Cf. article by A. D. Gorwala in "A Study of Nehru", *op. cit.*, Pp. 256-61.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, article by H. Mukerjee, P. 248; also see *ante*, especially Chapters 6 and 7.

to the Lucknow Congress, his grip on world affairs seemed nearly unique. Meanwhile, he had travelled widely, had witnessed something of the civil war in Spain, and while chary of too sharp a swerve to the Left—his association, as noted earlier, with the League against Imperialism was short-lived—realized the role of imperialism and its links with the excrescence called fascism. Of the Second World War he had a clearer grasp than did any of his colleagues, and when British hauteur and intransigence provoked the country's fury and goaded Congress into the "Quit India" struggle, it was Nehru who, as Gandhi himself related, was deeply mindful of the fascist menace, and for quite some time, "fought against my (Gandhi's) position with a passion which I have no words to describe." In the celebrated April 1939 correspondence with Subhas Chandra Bose, Jawaharlal was once twitted by Bose for a preternatural pre-occupation with the significance of happenings abroad; his reply on that occasion was significant: "To my misfortune, I am affected by international happenings more than I should be . . . . . I felt that we should not passively await events."<sup>3</sup> When freedom came, Nehru was rightly India's automatic choice as her first Foreign Minister.

There is no need to think of any casual link, but it is interesting to recall that certain concepts of Buddhist thought which Jawaharlal admired very much, have left their mark on free India's foreign policy. The expression *Panch-sheel* ('The Five Principles') is of Buddhist origin; in expounding the Eightfold Path which, the Buddha taught, one should seek to tread, if one wishes to find the reply to the problem of suffering, five principles of conduct were enumerated, which in a different garb have formed the staple of treaties entered into India with several countries in pursuit of her policy of peace, the object being the elimination of the woes of a world affrighted by the dangers of war and all the evil it connotes. As these lines

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<sup>3</sup> Brecher, *op. cit.*, P. 101.



are written, Ne Win, at present Burma's principal leader, announces the Burmese view of socialism as his country's objective—"neither totally Marxist, nor totally anti-Marxist, neither pro-capitalist nor pro-communist, but based on a middle way, free from deviation to left or right."<sup>4</sup> The Buddha's elucidation of the *Majhima Path*, 'the middle way', whatever its contemporary signification, has left a mark on our thought, which Nehru delighted in, as far as the bases of his foreign policy were concerned.

Nehru has been, in the words of his chief biographer, "the philosopher, the architect, the engineer and the voice of his country's policy towards the outside world." His personality and his approach stamped that policy so decisively that it became what "may properly be termed a private monopoly."<sup>5</sup> None of his colleagues, howsoever resistant to some of his ideas, could challenge his authority in this sphere, and the few voices raised against the fundamentals of his policy were more or less voices in the wilderness, for the country, by and large, had full faith in Nehru's wisdom and understanding in regard to world affairs. This faith received temporarily a rude shock when China in October-November 1962 capped a persistent campaign of pinpricks with aggression on our borders—a cruel jolt to the presuppositions and anticipations on the basis of which India's foreign policy had been formulated. Jawaharlal reeled for a while, but collected himself quickly. He would not retreat from principle; he would not repudiate the right course of conduct just because someone else had misbehaved, and while looking after his own country's interest with all possible care and earnestness, would reiterate the fundamentals of his policy which the wrong-doing of China or any other State could not vitiate.

Since 1947, Jawaharlal had repeatedly explained the point of view which India under his leadership brought to bear upon the world. "A policy", he once wrote, "must be

<sup>4</sup> Cf. "The Statesman" (Delhi daily), editorial article, Sept. 19, 1964.

<sup>5</sup> Brecher, *op. cit.*, P. 216.

in keeping with the tradition and temper of the country. It should be idealistic . . . . and realistic. If it is not idealistic, it becomes one of sheer opportunism ; if it is not realistic, then it is likely to be adventurist and wholly ineffective."<sup>6</sup> Long ago, in a different vein, he had quoted a poet's view of man, as:

child of earth,  
Yet fathered by the starry sky!'

There were geo-political and other compulsions which India could not wish away, but from out of her life and the experience garnered through the ages there had also risen certain imperatives which should, Nehru felt, play their role in shaping our foreign policy.

India emerged as an independent country in 1947 after a peculiarly difficult travail ; she bore, thus, some unpleasant birth-marks, as did also her twin-sister, Pakistan. The fact of Indian independence, however, changed in quality the climate of the world, and Jawaharlal Nehru, more conscious of it than most other people, cherished that fact and dearly wished for its further efflorescence into a wider fulfilment. It was with this end in view that he affirmed over and over again not only the objective strands of Indian foreign policy but also the values implicit in them. The main pillars, thus, of that policy were stated to be several, no doubt, but jointly propping up an integrated structure. First, it was anti-colonialism, for India, herself a sufferer who knew how the shoe pinched, would lend her support to all peoples, in Asia, Africa or elsewhere, breaking away from the colonial yoke and determining their own destiny ; second, a corollary of the first, namely, full equality of all races, irrespective of creed or colour ; third, non-alignment, which meant hostility to none, but a deliberate detachment from competitive power blocs, a determination to judge international issues on their merits and to exercise freedom of action on the

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, P. 217.

<sup>7</sup> "Glimpses of World History," Vol. II, P. 1503.



basis of such judgment ; fourth, recognition of Asia and of Africa as a newly emerging and vital element in world politics, free of the shackles that till lately impeded their development ; and fifth, relaxation of international tensions and a peaceful approach, through discussion, negotiation, even adjudication and similar methods, for achieving disarmament and settlement of disputes without recourse to violence and war. A foreign policy of peace and freedom, aimed at bringing about the phenomenon, so long yearned for, of a world without war, free of fear and want, where the dignity and happiness of our species can be as secure as we can make it—such, in sum, was and continues to be India's desire. To that desire none gave shape and form as much as did Jawaharlal Nehru.

Even before independence, when Nehru only headed an interim government as vice-president of the Viceroy's Executive Council, he took the initiative to call in Delhi the first Asian Relations Conference which met in March in the historic precincts of Purana Qila ('Old Fort'). It met in a city where the dark shadows of communal conflict had already been projected from the Punjab ; in concrete terms, it achieved little. Muslim League leaders ignored it completely ; Gandhi addressed it, but on his favourite theme, non-violence, which did not, it was feared, make much practical sense to people in Indonesia and elsewhere in a very tangible fight against imperialism. An organization of Asian States was set up, but more important was the fact of the conference having been held, a mighty portent for the period when Asia, long denied a place of honour in world politics, was re-entering the arena. And it was Nehru who made the prime moves in this matter and won for India much-needed international prestige and goodwill.

Gandhi had not been particularly drawn towards the theme of Asian unity—of Arabian chivalry, Persian poetry, Chinese ethics and the Indian world of thought, all growing up in the soil of Asian neighbourliness and peace. But it had been dear to men like Rabindranath Tagore, C. R. Das,

and M. A. Ansari ; even J. M. Sen Gupta in his address as reception committee chairman of the Calcutta Congress (1928), spoke of an "*Asiatic Zollverein*", and Subhas Chandra Bose had, in his own way, been attracted by the idea. Sensitive to the new mood of post-World War II Asia, Jawaharlal, with his historical imagination, thrilled to it, and as he spoke at the conference, he reached very great heights. His words were wonderful: "Far too long have we of Asia been petitioners in Western courts and chancelleries. That story must now belong to the past . . . . We do not intend to be playthings of others." While proud of India's significant role in the Asian resurgence, he repudiated any claim on India's part to the leadership of the Continent, but he stressed that the conference might "well stand out as a landmark which divides the past of Asia from the future."

For four years (1945-49) the Indonesians fought the Dutch who would not let go of their hold over the country, and it was a happy thought when, on India's initiative, a conference of Asian nations met in New Delhi (January 1949) to support the cause of Indonesian independence. Attended by official representatives of fifteen Asian states and observers from four others, it made recommendations to the United Nations Security Council for the transference of complete sovereignty to Indonesia, which she won by dint of her own heroic struggle and the developing strength which was beginning to make itself felt of a new Asia. The freedom of India in 1947 was followed, almost as a matter of course, by imperialist control being compelled to retreat from Ceylon and Burma in 1948, Indonesia in 1949 and Malaya eight years later. This inevitably meant that with India and the Asian rimland gone out of their hands, Britain could no longer maintain her hegemony over the Arab world, where with the conclusion of the war a sequence of events had been taking place. The Japanese sweep



through East Asia during the War, which showed up the clay feet of Western imperialists, whether British or French or Dutch or American, and then the defeat of the Fascist powers both in the east and the west, particularly with the powerful instrumentality of the Soviet Union, had set in a chain of world-shaking happenings. But the attainment of the freedom of India, the loss, that is to say, of what Lord Curzon called "the brightest gem in the British Crown," had set the process picturesquely in motion. And in 1955, it was largely due to Nehru's efforts that India as a sponsor and leader of the first conference of Asian and African countries at Bandung (Indonesia), represented the urge of the people of our two continents for peace and national freedom. At Hiroshima (1945), an Asian country, Japan, was chosen by Western imperialism as a "guinea-pig" for atomic war experimentation; the wheel almost turned full circle at Bandung (1955), when Asia and Africa proudly took their seat on the world stage.

The year of Bandung (1955) may be considered to be the high water-mark of Nehru's success in the sphere of foreign relations. Without obtruding herself, the India of Nehru had succeeded, in a friendly fashion, to provide leadership in a world historic event, namely, the political awakening of Asia after centuries of subjugation to colonialism. He had befriended the Chinese Revolution, in spite of certain misgivings which he had already sensed regarding the future shape of things in that country, and Chou En-lai allowed himself, at Bandung, perhaps with subtle irony, to be looked upon as a younger brother, as it were, to Nehru. With such leaders of the Afro-Arab world as Nasser and Nkrumah, he had established relations of the utmost cordiality and understanding. A short phase of Soviet misjudgment regarding India as a truly independent power was definitely left behind by Nehru's visit to Russia and the return journey to India made by Bulganin and Khrushchov (1955). Before 1947, Soviet delegates at the United Nations had offered touching support to the cause of Indian freedom,



but for several years after the transfer of power (August 1947) the Soviets appeared to have lively suspicions regarding the subordination of India to Anglo-American interests. Since 1955, however, Indo-Soviet relations have been consistently and increasingly friendly. India's relations with the United States of America also registered notable improvement; American arms aid to Pakistan had thrown a menacing shadow over these relations particularly in 1953-54, but the United States' comparatively intelligent approach towards the Suez problem (1956) and Nehru's second visit to America in that year would show how the position was getting better, and the two countries were no longer seriously estranged. Nehru's utilization of pressure from the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in order to moderate American attitudes on the crisis brewing over the Chinese (offshore) 'islands like Quemoy and Matsu in 1955 was another important achievement. Honoured and prized for varying reasons by the biggest Powers in either bloc, Nehru was at the same time respected and trusted by Afro-Asian countries. These latter, even though the image of Jawaharlal's India was later somewhat darkened, had come to think of him as "the sculptor of the ethics of our part of the world"—beautiful words which were said, in the U.N. Security Council to condole Nehru's death, by the Moroccan delegate, Ahmed Taibi Benhima."

Before referring to what may be termed "the debit side"<sup>10</sup> it is important to recall how India's contribution to the cause of peace and progress in the world sphere had been, under Nehru's lead, substantial and significant. This is an incontestable proposition, whatever the details of one's criticism of his foreign policy might be. Without India's efforts, jointly with the efforts of the USSR and China, the cease-fire in Korea, which was the first big powder-magazine, so to speak, in the post-war set-up of things, could not have been

<sup>10</sup> U.N. Weekly News letter, 5 June, 1964, P. 1; see articles by Gamal Abdel Nasser, Kwame N. Krumah, Abdul Karim Kassim and U Nu in "A Study of Nehru", *op. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Pp. 248-55.



achieved. Without India's efforts, the flames of war could hardly have been extinguished in Indo-China. India's tireless insistence, in spite of jolts received over the question of Tibet at a certain stage, that the Chinese People's Republic be accorded its rightful position in the United Nations, and her advocacy, even after China had shown her a somewhat unpleasant visage, of China's indisputable title to Taiwan, which was Chinese even before America had been discovered, are of prime importance in recent world history. The principled stand taken by India in consistent manner and undeterred by provocations or by misunderstanding on the question of prohibiting atomic and hydrogen weapons of war and of reducing armaments, with a view to utilizing for peaceful construction the immense resources now absorbed by the arms drive, has had, even from unwilling quarters, the approbation which it merited so well. At Bandung, where Nehru was a key figure, respected and looked up to for guidance and for the formulation of a basic approach, India's role shone out. India also distinguished herself by protesting strongly, without fear or expectation of favours from certain powers, against aggressive military blocs, and by delineating, in moral and political terms, her dynamic detachment from competitive camps and the virtues, which even sceptical powers came increasingly to acknowledge, of a principled policy of non-alignment. Her voice has always been heard with respect in the counsels of the world regarding collective peace and the settlement of international problems by negotiation. The Panchsheel, a concept redolent of India's history, which India and China were the first to invoke and promulgate jointly for the world to follow, calls for peaceful co-existence of nations, inculcates respect for one another's rights and heralds the only way for the present system of States to move ahead towards a better world. China's defiant decline from principle in this regard cannot vitiate the record, even if it has meant a holding up of the advance that was devoutly wished for.

Conducting foreign policy is by no means a flight into the rarefied air of moral elevation, and Nehru was well aware



of it. He said, for example, in his speech to the Constituent Assembly on December 4, 1947: "Whatever policy you may lay down, the art of conducting the foreign affairs of a country lies in finding out what is most advantageous to the country. We may talk about international goodwill and mean what we say, but in the ultimate analysis a government functions for the good of the country it governs, and no government dares to do anything which in the short or long run is manifestly to the disadvantage of that country." In the course of the same speech he also said: "Ultimately, foreign policy is the outcome of economic policy and until India has properly evolved her economic policy, her foreign policy will be rather vague, rather inchoate and will be groping." Quite apart, thus, from whatever opinion Indian foreign policy won abroad from time to time, it had to satisfy two crucial tests: it must bring advantage to the country; and it must be broad-based on a firm economic policy. On both these counts, there was a sizeable debit side to Nehru's ledger.

Our relations with Pakistan, which continue to be still unhappy, represent a major weakness. For this, the responsibility has perhaps been not so much India's as of Britain, for the latter, particularly since Pakistan's raiders crossed into Kashmir with fire and sword, has done all she could, in her usual sanctimonious manner, to bedevil Indo-Pakistani relationship, whether in the United Nations or elsewhere. Nehru used to repeat his conviction that we could not be "enemies for ever" with any country, and more essentially, with Pakistan. It used to be his favourite contention that "India has inherited no past hostility to any country", least of all with Pakistan, part indeed of ourselves, and we had not the remotest intention of starting a new "train of hostility" with any power. In 1949, he told the Indian Council of World Affairs about "an astonishing thing—this partition that has taken place", adding poignantly: "What was broken up was the body of India. That produced tremendous consequences not only those that you saw, but those that you could not imagine, in the minds and souls of millions of human



beings. We saw enormous migrations as a result of them, but what was deeper than that was the hurt and injury to the soul of India. We are getting over it, as people get over almost any type of injury, and we are again developing closer relations with Pakistan."<sup>11</sup> It was the voice of anguish and at the same time of an invincible goodwill, but in foreign policy as elsewhere nothing fails like failure, and it is as expiation of our original sin in having let the British extract the price of partition for the transfer of power to two separate States in our country that an impasse, sometimes tragic and always unpleasant, continues in Indo-Pakistan relations.

Over Kashmir, there continues to be undeclared war between the two, with varying degrees of intensity. Over the division of the Indus waters a settlement has been reached, and in regard to compensation for properties left by refugees, only a partial settlement has taken place, the more than seven million migrants to India from East Pakistan having yet had no satisfaction on this issue. From East Pakistan, where some eight or nine million Hindus are still residing, there continues to be an unceasing stream of people forced out of their homes by insecurity, indignity and occasional violence to seek refuge in India already overburdened with demographic as well as economic problems. It may well be that one reason why Jawaharlal was stricken down in January 1964 was the shock his mind and heart received as news of communal troubles came from East Pakistan and something like a sordid chain reaction took place in India. However, it is clear that Kashmir is the crux of the matter and is the root of all trouble between the two countries.

Nehru had to face the accusation that when the state of Jammu and Kashmir had legally acceded to the Union of India and when Indian forces, sent at the Maharaja's importunity, had beaten the Pakistani raiders back at Baramula, he should have ordered the army to pursue the

<sup>11</sup> Quotations in "India's Spokesman", *op. cit.*, Pp. 47, 86, 91.

raiders and clear the entire territory of all intruders. It was even suggested that a strong man like Patel, if he had his way, would have done it, but that Nehru, with his refinement, was timorous and squeamish. Earlier, it has been noted how Mountbatten's earnest advice was that India should hold her hand or full-scale war with Pakistan would follow. The British at that time (late 1947) was doing a lot of behind-scenes egging-on in Pakistan, and it was sensible of Nehru to believe that Mountbatten knew what was what. And constituted as he was, Nehru was feeling so deeply the wounds of partition that he could not, with any equanimity, confront a war that would bring infinite and the most grievous aggravations. Besides, there is no reason to think that any of his Cabinet colleagues, aware especially that Mahatma Gandhi was in the picture, counselled going ahead in Kashmir militarily and facing the consequences. As Nehru put it in his own typical way: "We have indeed been overscrupulous in this (Kashmir) matter, so that nothing may be done in the passion of the moment which might be wrong."<sup>12</sup>

From January 1, 1949, a cease-fire was proclaimed by India and Pakistan, and the desultory and limited fighting that had been going on was stopped at the request of the United Nations. Since that date, U.N. military observers have been watching the cease-fire, and the tentative line of division has continued. It appears that India made the mistake of having appealed to the United Nations (December 30, 1947) under articles 34 and 35 of the Charter, that is, under "peaceful settlement of disputes," Chapter Six, rather than under Chapter Seven on "acts of aggression". This has helped the U.N., under Anglo-American influence, to persist in regarding the Kashmir problem as a situation in dispute and never to put it into the frame of an act of aggression, which indeed it was found to have been the case.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Quotation in F. Moraes, "Jawaharlal Nehru" (New York, 1956). P. 395.

<sup>13</sup> Vincent Sheean, "Nehru: The Years of Power" (London, 1960), P. 140.



Here it is neither possible nor necessary to refer in any detail to what has been aptly called the "Anglo-American plot against Kashmir".<sup>14</sup> Indeed, on various occasions since 1948 till today, Indo-British relations have been strained on account of London's support to the Pakistani claim which is nothing more nor less than that Kashmir, because of its Muslim majority, must *ipso facto* be in Pakistan. Similarly India has never yet been able to look upon the United States as a friend she can trust, largely because of Washington's support of Pakistan over the Kashmir issue, the U.S. arms aid to Pakistan since 1954, while Pakistan openly avows its intention of "liberating" Kashmir, by force if necessary, and Anglo-American moves regarding Kashmir in the Security Council. Nehru did offer, no doubt, the suggestion of a plebiscite to be held in Kashmir under U.N. supervision in order to secure the people's ratification of the accession to India. But since that offer was made, much water had flown down bridges everywhere, changing the picture qualitatively, as it were, and making a plebiscite of the kind envisaged earlier fairly redundant. Most people in India are convinced that Pakistan committing acts of undoubted aggression put herself, as it were, out of court, that its continued bellicosity on this issue aggravates a situation where Pakistan muddies the waters only in order to be able to fish better, that the U.N. has been repeatedly guilty of dereliction of duty and of partisanship, and that India's legal and moral claim to Kashmir is indubitable. What weighed with Nehru most was that in repeated elections the people of Kashmir had practically ratified the accession, even though the poll might not have been conducted quite as freely and fairly as in the rest of India, and also that a certain amount of disequilibrium inevitable in present conditions, when good and clean administration could very well consolidate stability in Kashmir politics, might endanger the character of India as a secular state with some fifty million Muslims among her

<sup>14</sup> Cf. the book of that name, previously cited, by Vijay Kumar (Delhi, 1954).



citizens. Nehru knew also the character of those who had been throughout egging Pakistan on in this adventure, making Kashmir the one predominant issue in Pakistan politics. In a speech (August 1952), he said: "Kashmir is only a plaything for them (Pakistan's patrons), while it was very much in our hearts. They had the audacity to talk of imperialism to us when they were imperialists themselves and were carrying on their own wars and preparing for future wars. Just because India had tried to protect Kashmir from territorial invasion people had the temerity to talk of Indian imperialism!"<sup>15</sup>

To the end, however, Jawaharlal was keenest of all to have a solution of this perverse but powerful and persistent conflict, provided it could be done with honour and mutual understanding and also particularly that India's secular character was not polluted and the minorities could live securely and with dignity and self-respect. Tentatively, he had even thrown out hints that perhaps a division (though not desirable in itself but as a practical measure) along the cease-fire line could be mutually agreed upon, since so many years had already passed. Repeatedly he offered to Pakistan a no-war declaration and his constant readiness to negotiate and settle every pending issue. He even went so far as to state in Parliament, when the concept of an eventual confederation of the two States was mentioned, that if Pakistan did not so strongly resent such ideas he would peer into the future himself and make similar long-term formulations. When frail and virtually under the shadow of death, Jawaharlal was meeting Sheikh Abdulla for lengthy discussion of probable ways out of the impasse and was evidently thinking of fresh initiatives for a settlement. The problem, however, had been deliberately accentuated by exactly those elements in world politics that were unhappy to see free India striding away from the orbit of their influence and exploited the weaknesses inherent in the 1947 transfer of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Moraes, *op. cit.*, Pp. 397-98.



power. Jawaharlal did not perhaps fail to see but wanted, in decency, to shut his eyes to the fact that India and Pakistan would not be left alone to settle outstanding differences, for the leaders of the world camp of reaction, Britain and the U.S., wanted their finger in the pie as far as this part of the globe was concerned.

The so-called "Western world" has looked askance at every single step of India's for completion and consolidation of her independence. It will be recalled how Nehru had to be patient even in regard to certain elementary measures that were essential to the integrity and security of his country. After a long wait and some mass struggle on the spot, *de facto* transfer of French possessions in India took place, but it required several more unconscionable years before *de jure* integration of the relevant areas was agreed to by France. Infinitely more egregious was the forcible retention by Portugal of her enclaves in India for more than fourteen years after the country was free. Nehru's government proceeded with almost uncanny patience in this matter. Even when the inhabitants of an area like Nagar Haveli successfully expelled the Portuguese and set up their own modest apparatus of administration, integration with India was deferred in fear of international complications, ridiculous but real, which might be engineered by interested parties. The Government of India even thought fit to appear in the World Court and to seek to answer Portugal's insolent charge that India had prevented her marching across Indian territory to reconquer Nagar Haveli. It is clear that we suffered these petty humiliations not so much because of Portugal's power which is very little but because of her patrons like Britain and the USA. Apart from such things as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) linking them, there were, it appeared, Anglo-Portuguese Treaties which the Portuguese dictator, Dr. Salazar, often claimed could be invoked if India resolutely cleared her soil of the taint of alien domination. In spite of India being in the Commonwealth, Britain has always thought of Portugal as



her "oldest ally", and when in 1958 this matter of Salazar's claim was brought up in the House of Commons by way of a question the British Government maintained a discreet but very expressive silence. When at last in late-1961, India found herself constrained to take police action and the hated rule of Portugal on Indian soil collapsed, Nehru was pilloried in the United Nations Security Council by the Anglo-American spokesmen and their camp followers. As over the issue of Kashmir, every time it has been dragged to the world forum, it was the socialist third of the globe that stood by India and answered slanders on the Nehru policy in external affairs. The attitude of so-called "Western" democrats was to find expression, even at a moment when India was in mourning for her great son, in the words of a distinguished "liberal", Salvador de Madariaga: "We have seen the great pacifist and internationalist, whose neutralism rested on a profound disbelief in the power of arms to solve human conflicts, attack Goa by force of arms . . .". Not content with this venom, the "liberal" went ahead, alleging that Nehru had "hedged on the Soviet aggression against Hungary" and "the Chinese aggression on Tibet", besides being "often shifty and procrastinating when faced with Chinese aggression."<sup>16</sup> Nehru never fully realized the implications of such democratic venom, even when it was poured out of Indian vessels. When a critic, now president of the *Jan Sangh*, once said: "Neither Goa nor Kashmir is a problem of India, Pandit Nehru is the problem number one of India,"<sup>17</sup> he would laugh it away as the voice of a lunatic fringe, but there was more than mere method in such apparent madness, there was scheming and organization of reactionary forces in India in unison with their mentors and patrons of "the West".

All this kind of thing happened on account of the weakness of our economic and also necessarily of our strategic

<sup>16</sup> Quotations in "Thought", Delhi weekly, July 4, 1964.

<sup>17</sup> Devaprasad Ghosh, quoted in S. R. Patel, "Foreign Policy of India", (Bombay, 1960), P. 32.



base. To the extent that we continue to depend on countries like the U.K. and the U.S.A. which, because of the categorical imperatives of the capitalist system, cannot and do not really wish us well and aim at the perpetuation, if they have their way, of our economic dependence, that weakness continues. The U.K.'s Suez adventure (1956) cost our Plans, only in increased freight, let alone other factors like the resultant delay in the implementation of projects, no less than 150 million rupees. Till assistance from socialist countries began to concretise the Western Powers hardly lent a hand in setting up basic heavy industries in India—even now they do it sparingly and with typical reservations. It is not, of course, suggested that India, on achieving independence, could just wish away her recent past, and that if only he wished it, Nehru could write, boldly on a clear socialist slate. But it will be folly to forget how the nature of our external relations, even as conducted by Nehru, has inhibited the pace and quality of our advance. On July 7, 1950, Nehru said that "our economic policy is obviously tied to England and other Western powers", but that "political policy is another matter". This is a duality, however, which he could not resolve, though in the last decade or so he made a notable effort in that direction.<sup>18</sup>

It must be recorded that it needed no little courage for Nehru to aver, as he did in December 1947: "We intend cooperating with the United States of America and we intend cooperating fully with the Soviet Union". The decision, even at a time when Nehru was facing severe problems at home and in foreign relations, to avoid alignments in the world conflict between the two camps, indicated a gratifyingly adult refusal to see world politics in terms of black and white. On November 3, 1948, he told the United Nations General Assembly in Paris: ".... The world is something bigger than Europe, and you will not solve your problems by thinking that the problems of the world are

<sup>18</sup> "A Study of Nehru", *op. cit.*, P. 251.

mainly European problems . . . . We propose to go ahead at a rapid pace — we propose to build and construct and be a power for peace and for the good of the world. We propose to meet every aggression, from whatever quarter it comes, in every possible way open to us." On March 22, 1949, he spoke before the Indian Council of World Affairs at New Delhi: "India is too big a country herself to be bound down to any country, however big it may be. India is going to be and is bound to be a country that counts in world affairs, not I hope in the military sense, but in many other senses which are more important and effective in the end." On October 13, 1949, addressing the United States Congress in joint session, he said that India had no desire for leadership in Asia or anywhere, though "geographically speaking, India is a pivot", and whether she liked it or not she had to play "a distinctive and important role" or "just fade out", adding, significantly, towards the end that it was "a wrong approach for any country or any people to expect complete agreement with another country or people." On November 20, 1956, speaking before Lok Sabha he condemned the cold war, then current, for creating "a bigger mental barrier than brick walls or iron curtains do", and added: "We are not obsessed by fear. We are not obsessed by hatred of any country. We are not obsessed even by the dislike of any country. Our minds are a little more receptive than those of others—communists, anti-communists or socialists. I do think that is a virtue in us and it is in the good democratic tradition. When that goes, it is bad for the world."<sup>1</sup>

However, to keep the record straight, one should recall that for quite some time, perhaps not quite inescapably, India did take sides—with the "West", even to the extent of being unwilling, soon after independence, to utilize the Soviet offer of technical aid, completely without strings, made at the ECAFE conference and elsewhere. On April 28, 1950, G. S. Bajpai, then Secretary-General of India's

<sup>1</sup> Quotations in "India's Spokesman", *op. cit.*, Pp. 65-67, 95, 101-05, 118.



External Affairs Ministry, told the "New York Times": "We do not like to talk about which side we would come in on, but I think the answer is evident to you." Indian Civil servants, unlike their British prototypes, are apparently permitted to make policy statements; one can recall, in this connection, H.V.R. Iengar's 1957 speeches in America on the role of the private sector in India's economy. People more highly placed, like Shrimati Vijayalakshmi Pandit, asserted in New York on September 19, 1951, that India's foreign policy was "pro-Free Nations," and pointed out in proof: "In the recent sessions of the General Assembly, we voted as you did 38 times out of 51, abstaining 11 times and differing from you only twice." This was said at a time when leading U.S. statesmen were openly declaring that the support of Nehru was "worth many divisions."<sup>20</sup> It might seem gratuitous to be recalling these things instead of dismissing them as observations which were inconsequential, but they have considerable relevance, for in 1959 Ambassador Chagla, a scrupulously well-spoken person, pleaded often enough in Washington for more U.S. aid to India lest we should go communist, his successors in office have made worse *faux pas* and stray men from Nehru's own Cabinet who need not be named have spoken often very differently from what their chief would have done.

Indeed, in Nehru's own mind there seems to have been a dichotomy which should, in fairness, be remembered. In June 1950, he was making speeches in Singapore where he unkindly branded the Malayan liberation movement, whatever its shortcomings and excesses, as sheer terrorism, and nearly oblivious of the post-war history of South-East Asia called communism the enemy of nationalism. This was almost reminiscent of his somewhat unfortunate visit to Singapore in March 1946 and meetings which were not very pleasant with I.N.A. personnel.<sup>21</sup> For quite some time his attitude towards Ho Chi Minh's régime in North

<sup>20</sup> Cf. S. Natarajan, "American Shadow over India" (1952), *passim*.

<sup>21</sup> Hugh Toye, "The Springing Tiger" (1959), Pp. 174-75.



Vietnam was equivocal ; over Korea, he wobbled in the beginning and even when he saw better, was sometimes shaky ; from Indonesia to Egypt, he was calling for moderation in all those countries. Perhaps he was not very happy when Communists took over in China, with the people obviously enthused at the change. It is by no means unlikely that with Japan rather out of the running, India and China, consciously or otherwise, were rivals for the leadership of Asia, and in 1949-50 Nehru did not feel very bucked at the turn of events, though he was among the first to recognize the People's Republic of China and through good report and evil report, championed its claim to membership in the United Nations. China's conduct later, especially in relation to India, has been egregious ; when the full reckoning is made, she will have very much indeed to answer for. But it would be unhistorical and wrong to deny that if the Chinese revolution had not happened, India might perforce have been dragged into the camp of anti-socialism, in spite of Nehru's refusal to enter that perilous parlour. One wonders, indeed, recalling the early 'fifties what would have happened if the Chinese Revolution had not taken place when it did, if the Soviet Union had been panicked by the American atomic monopoly for quite several years, if the global movement for peace—which Nehru even sought to ridicule in the Indian Parliament (June 12, 1952) by saying: 'Join the peace movement and have free trips all over the world'!—had not developed massive strength in different countries. Would this, then, not have been today a world dominated by Washington, with nowhere a balance for India even to try to tilt? Whatever obloquy one might rightfully pour on certain subsequent developments in China, the revolution there had indeed changed the very climate of world politics, and it was a good thing that Nehru recognized its importance and made friends with it. Fortified by the Panchsheel declarations and the Bandung spirit, India-China friendship in spite of occasional jolts, was one of the firmest factors for peace and progress till,



in a fit of perversity, China decided to call it a day and bedevilled the atmosphere by the most impermissible behaviour.

Indo-Soviet relations illustrate how India had not pursued from the beginning a well-set and thought-out policy. Before the transfer of power, the Soviets had developed amity with India at the U.N. General Assembly in 1946-47; Molotov's celebrated reference to India being soon fully free had, it was reported, drawn tears from Indian listeners. But from the autumn of 1947 there started a period, so to speak, of estrangement, on account, largely no doubt, of a somewhat erroneous evaluation which Soviet analysts made of Indian independence, and partly of Nehru's equivocal stand on several issues which communists considered crucial. With Radhakrishnan at the Moscow embassy in July 1949, however, things began to look up, and Nehru's correspondence with Stalin over Korea in 1950 helped the good work. It was not till late-1953, however, that a three-year trade pact was signed—quite a drastic change from what had been said in Parliament by leading Ministers about trade with socialist countries being an unfamiliar and perhaps impossible venture. Much water has flowed since then, and such events as the visit of Nehru to the U.S.S.R. and of Soviet leaders to India (1955) and the adherence of India and the U.S.S.R. to a joint *Panch Sheel* declaration have been followed up by many vital happenings. The two countries have moved forward from co-existence to co-operation; Soviet aid to India, in the form of steel works and heavy machine-building and even armament industry has continued to be impressive; all the world over, the mutual recognition of the necessity of friendship and co-operation between communist and non-communist countries has changed the pattern of world trade and the perspectives opening out before hitherto underdeveloped countries eager to go ahead and build a better life for untold millions long condemned to deprivation. In the early phase of Indo-Soviet friendship, occasional strain was sometimes visible, but particularly since China's aggression and the crooked moves of a country like Pakistan, very



much in the good books of the "West" and yet colluding with China in order to spite and humiliate India, that friendship has become stable and sure. This has been an achievement due partly, no doubt, to India's importance as a country whose goodwill is very much worth having, and also, in no small measure, to the wise and perceptive approach to world problems of Jawaharlal Nehru.

A genuine predilection for peace, apart from its sheer practical necessity for a world which, in this nuclear age, faces annihilation if full-scale war breaks out, has been the principal motive for India's policy, which was pre-eminently Jawaharlal's, of non-alignment, of non-involvement in Power blocs and a consequent capacity for influencing trends and tendencies making for a world without war. However, when the value of India's work, at least till some years ago, as an "honest broker of peace" between conflicting camps is conceded, the fact remains that India has a powerful, and perhaps potentially menacing, orientation towards the British Commonwealth and what is called the West. Years ago, at Lucknow in 1936, Nehru had said: "If we remain within the imperialist fold, whatever be our name and status, whatever outer semblance of political power we might have, we remain cribbed and confined, and allied to and dominated by the reactionary forces and the great financial vested interests of the capitalist world." No doubt the world has changed a lot since then, and imperialism has almost become what the Chinese picturesquely call "a paper tiger", but the change is not yet as entire as Nehru sometimes appeared to think it was. In 1953, he affirmed that India had "gained positively by being in the Commonwealth"—a proposition to which many demurred then and would demur now. It is reported that King George VI himself, perhaps on Mountbatten's advice, agreed to the idea of India, a Republic from January 26, 1950, being in a Commonwealth presided over by Royalty, thus making an apparently impressive gesture.<sup>22</sup> Somewhat

<sup>22</sup> "The Commonwealth Link", by Sir Francis Low in "A Study of Nehru", P. 270.



intriguingly, it has been recently revealed that in 1943, Lord Wavell, the Viceroy of India, had proposed that Gandhi and Nehru should be released from jail and asked to join his Executive Council, but that the suggestion "received no support at all from London and made King George VI very angry".<sup>23</sup> The decision in 1950 to remain a member of the Commonwealth actually had caused much surprise both at home and abroad, and was unenthusiastically received in India. The only argument for the decision that made any sense was that it was sensible not to break away from a familiar association when "no binding factor or inhibition accompanies it". The more material arguments were usually left unsaid, namely, that a major part of India's trade as well as her foreign exchange reserves, which meant her industrial development, were tied up with the sterling area and India's armed forces were trained on British lines and equipped with British-made weapons. It is known that there never has been now can there be any attachment in India to the British Crown, however symbolic, or to the Commonwealth as such. Over Kashmir repeatedly, over relations with Pakistan, over South Africa and issues like Goa, over the question of Immigration and economic problems relating to the European Common Market, over even such petty and irritating things as the protracted British refusal to return to us the India Office Library, the Commonwealth hinders rather than helps us. No doubt we are long past the days when, as in May 1952, the Union Jack once flew, by mistake it was said, over India's Parliament House, or when Nehru had to try for several years before Gurkha recruitment camps for the British army could be disallowed on Indian soil. However, in the realm of international relations, Britain rather than India has been the beneficiary of the Commonwealth link. Nehru's attitude and statements in regard to Malaya, Kenya and British Guiana could be contrasted, for example, with

<sup>23</sup> K. A. Aziz, "Britain and Muslim India", (London, 1963), P. 157, quoting from J. W. Wheeler-Bennett, "King George VI" (London, 1958), P. 703.



his stand respecting Indo-China, Indonesia and Goa, and they showed considerably more sedate criticism of British colonial excesses than of the French, Dutch and Portuguese variety. It could also be noticed that when India criticised the "West", it appeared to have been directed more to the United States than to Britain whose part in the alliance was no less zealous. Indeed, except for the miserable British misadventure over Suez, Britain has largely escaped the odium which, on occasion, India's criticism of "Western" policies had thrown in the direction, largely, of the United States.

The U.S.A. is India's biggest creditor, and with that powerful country, with its ring of bases all around the globe, Nehru built up relations which might conceivably, in a crisis, tie us to their chariot. In spite of India's courageous assertion of viewpoints regarding disarmament and peace and nuclear warfare and the status of China which have angered the United States, the value to it of India's goodwill has grown rather than dwindled. In our unfortunate dependence on imports of foodgrains, the U.S. Public Law 480 has come in very useful, at least for the time being, though with incalculable long-term involvements. When China perpetrated aggression on our borders and presented world reaction on a platter of gold with a wonderful opportunity for aggrandisement, the United States and the United Kingdom made a brave show of immediate assistance. Nehru, of course, while appreciative of tangible aid and always insistent that such aid had to be without strings, knew what was what and would not yield to the clamour for a military alliance and the dangerous paraphernalia of commitment which such a tie-up would bring in its train. But there were in Nehru's entourage, and there are in the highest circles now, many powerful and designing people who would, if they could, shed the links that have grown between India and the socialist world. It continues, thus, to be important for the U.S. to make sure that in spite of provocation, India can in good time be coaxed away from the



independent strands of her foreign policy. Unceasingly, therefore, pressure continues to be brought to bear on India in various ways in order that *Panchsheel* might be virtually forsworn and India aligned herself definitely with "the free world". Even the calamity of the Chinese aggression did not make Nehru yield to such pressure though, understandably, he wobbled a little, but certain people, no doubt, have been cultivating long-term expectations, and with Nehru no longer on the scene, might well be more than usually active.

For India to steer her way in the sphere of international relations has not been an easy task, but there is no doubt that on the whole Nehru made an effective and principled job of it. There were mistakes, of course, and miscalculations; there were difficulties and deficiencies inherent in India's situation in a complicated and competitive world; there were problems that, in the given set-up, could not be settled to India's advantage. Even so, Nehru has left an impressive and honourable record. He had been accused, unjustly, of playing between two camps and trying to draw advantage from either—in the process, having to lean heavily on the side that could be no friend to an underdeveloped, ex-colonial country. But when the facts are known, and the difficulties that confronted him, Nehru does appear to have pursued as steadfastly as his circumstances would let him, the path of principle, of attachment to peace and people's well-being, of resistance to conflicts which, if not resolved or at least subdued, were sure to end up in cataclysmic war. His step often faltered but he knew the right way. And his understanding was usually faultless, though his actions were not nearly so. To him, perhaps more than to any other contemporary statesman, should go the credit of helping to evolve in practice the concept of non-alignment, of a growing peace zone, of mutual assistance between nations, of a co-operative approach to the resolution of conflicts. Non-alignment, he said in a speech to the National Defence College, New Delhi, "has not suddenly

come out of a hat. It was a natural, inevitable thing, both because of our thinking and our geography. . . . It is a basic way of thinking which, I think, lessens dangers in the practical sense, and promotes an atmosphere which is better than the atmosphere of cold war."<sup>24</sup>

When China in October-November 1962 committed aggression on India's borders, there was inevitably a lot of hue and cry, aimed skilfully against non-alignment and in favour of link-up with Powers only too anxious to inveigle Nehru into the camp of anti-communism. India's great leader had a head over his shoulders, and when, after the first initial shock and bewilderment, both India's Communist Party and the world's leading Communist country, the Soviet Union, upbraided China's action and upheld the urgency of India's national defence, he could more easily win over his countrymen to the unexceptionable formulation that it was not Communism but the perverse chauvinism of China that India had to contend against. Never under-rating the paramount requirements of defence, he explained, with persistent courage, that in order not to jeopardize her entire future India must simultaneously undertake the tasks of defence as well as of development, both being inextricably intertwined. And with the refinement so rare in the world's politicians he insisted that India and China were both great countries that could not be ordered about, that he was ready for an honourable settlement of disputes by negotiation, that against the people of China and their culture India had no animus even though the effort of India sincerely to befriend China had been so crudely rebuffed by the leaders of that country who zealously spouted revolutionary words but objectively assisted reactionary machinations. From time to time he would make mistakes of emphasis, and in a peculiarly complex situation it was only to be expected, but his basic stand was un-

<sup>24</sup> "The Hindu", Madras daily, April 28, 1960; on non-alignment, generally, see "Outside the Contest", ed. K. P. Karunakaran (Delhi, 1963), *passim*.



exceptionable. That this aspect of things could not be communicated to the world with sufficient effect was not only due to the faults of Indian publicity and the fact of Nehru's diplomatic personnel being notoriously unresponsive to his fundamental faith, but to China's persistent and exaggerated portraiture of certain loopholes, already indicated, in Nehru's foreign policy.

With the large-heartedness that was natural to him, Nehru had watched and admired the resurgence of a hoary country like China in the 'twenties and subsequently fought for freedom and fulfilment. It was during his tenure of office as Congress president that a medical mission, led by Dr. Atal, was sent by the Congress as a gesture of friendship; the mission was mostly attached to the Eighth Route Army, manned and led by Communists fighting the Japanese fascist forces. With Chiang K'ai-shek and his wife he had formed ties of friendship, but when the Revolution found them stranded in Taiwan, paying the wages of their political sin, Nehru wasted no sympathy on them, recognized forthwith the People's Republic and accredited to Peking his most perspicacious ambassador, K. M. Panikkar. In a broadcast from London (January 12, 1951) he spoke of a great nation, China, having been "reborn and conscious of her new strength". He said he regretted the manner in which China had sometimes acted,—a reference to happenings relative to Tibet—but, he added, "we have to remember the background of China, as of other Asian countries, the long period of struggle and frustration, the insolent treatment that they received from imperialist powers and the latters' refusal to deal with them on terms of equality."<sup>25</sup> Consistently with this view, he signed with China the *Panchsheel* treaty which meant India's recognition of China's suzerainty over Tibet (now called the Tibet region of China), meant also, by implication though not by explicit statement, that the traditional frontier between the two countries, subject to minor adjustments by negotiation, would remain inviolable,

<sup>25</sup> "India's Spokesman", *op. cit.*, P. 82.



and appeared to herald a period of friendship celebrated with heady enthusiasm in Harindranath Chattopadhyaya's sonorous composition, "Hindi-China Bhai Bhai!" When, specially since 1959 tension grew between the two countries and in 1962 the blow came sharp and swift from China, it seemed for a while as if in the years preceding, a pleasant but dangerously enervating euphoria had prevailed, but Nehru knew what was the truth, namely, that jolts and jars apart, India-China friendship was the inescapable basis of peace and progress in our part of the world, and that whatever the set-back it could only be temporary. In the anger, however, that naturally overtook our people at what plainly appeared to be China's perfidious response to our friendly advances, this long-term aspect of the picture was hardly presented by India to her friends in Afro-Asia, who were, in this specific moment, especially fed with masses of tendentious and plausible-seeming propaganda by Chinese agencies.

When there was friction in 1950 between China and India over the question of Tibet, China hurled against India the most wounding invectives, but provocation apart, it is important to remember that our perhaps indeliberate pursuit of the traditional British policy of detaching Tibet from Chinese control as a buffer state between the two countries was faulty and self-frustrating. Except on the assumption, which some people in India did indeed make and continue to hold, that Tibet had a way of life akin to ours and in spite of the mediæval immobility characteristic of it had a right to its autonomy and peculiar identity guaranteed against the winds of change that necessarily blew from the Chinese direction, that policy could no longer pass muster. A stern, unbending critic of Nehru's, J. B. Kripalani, once remarked: "*Panchsheel* was born in sin, for it was initiated to put our seal of approval on the destruction of an ancient nation associated with us culturally and spiritually."<sup>26</sup> With all his sympathy for the Tibetan

<sup>26</sup> S. R. Patel, "Foreign Policy of India", P. 87.



people and a certain soft corner in his heart for the kind of serenity which seems to shine in the face of such men as the Dalai Lama, Nehru could never agree with such critics. It is a pity, therefore, that, he did not, or perhaps did not have the time and opportunity to think out the main planks of India's Himalayan policy. No doubt it is correct to state that a successor state like India inheriting territorial and jurisdictional rights, could not and should not be blackmailed out of such rights; if change was warranted, it needed to be effected by relevant discussion with interested parties, not by threat or varieties of pressure that a self-respecting State would not tolerate. It remains a fact, however, that Britain had, in her own imperial interest which were threatened at one time by the rival imperialism of Czarist Russia, set up in the Himalayan region a peculiar patchwork of client states of varying hue, among them specially Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim, and had required Tibet to remain, not in her own interest but in that of the rival imperialism, as a buffer country. That India has no sinister design on these countries is self-evident; even so, in spite of India's readiness to help Nepal, her attitude in regard to "democratization" in that country has been misinterpreted and exploited against her, making Indian diplomacy in relation to Nepal a particularly onerous, if important, task.<sup>27</sup> The reliance, in different degrees, of Bhutan and Sikkim on India is a hang-over from the past, but lends itself to anti-Indian machinations in those States and enables a picture being painted abroad of India as the British Empire's successor in that part of the world. As the rulers of China developed certain complexes—their fixation, for instance, that India was as good as in the camp of reaction since Nehru's "philosophy" was wanting in revolutionary virtues and his practice was worse—they thought little of what might be the result of a rude prod against India; perhaps in their ultra-revolutionary hallucination they expected a

<sup>27</sup> Karunakaran, *op. cit.*, Pp. 86-87.



breakdown of the administration at least over certain strategic areas and the simultaneous emergence of indigenous forces initiating a revolution that Nehru, they were convinced, would never make. Posing as friends of the Himalayan and sub-Himalayan peoples, they would draw them in as partners in the task of setting up a social system similar to China's after 1949. And if, as a result of such upheaval, the "West" really stirred and tried to defeat it, well, the "paper tiger" theory came handy to prove that such action would indeed be the funeral of the "West" and the triumph of "revolution" as China saw it! All this might seem crude and incredible to us, but from South-East Asia to the Atlantic extremities of Africa there were people ready and willing to believe that India, a large and populous country, was not behaving too well and was not showing sufficient fighting spirit against imperialism while China, staking everything on the cause of revolution and braving even the hostility of Russia towards her ultra-revolutionary zeal, was the real champion of the underdog everywhere. If in the meantime India's image abroad had not deteriorated, such propaganda would have produced little effect. It so happened, however, that Nehru's policy which, with its broad vision and generous sweep, had looked at one time like capturing Afro-Asian hearts had been so personalized that it was not easily radiated, not properly explained to and grasped by colleagues and subordinates at various levels, while he was too highly civilized and was too forgiving to make sure that elements working at cross purposes were weeded out. Besides, the exigencies arising out of China's acute unfriendliness made Nehru turn, in sheer self-defence, in certain directions about which Afro-Asian sentiment is rightly suspicious, and to that extent, and perhaps unavoidably, the image of India and invariably also of Nehru was somewhat tarnished.

If the country is loyal to the essential elements of Jawaharlal's legacy in the sphere of foreign relations, a certain diminution of India's role for peace and freedom



and world amity should be no more than a very passing phase. Here is a responsibility which, now that Jawaharlal is not on the scene, our people and their leaders cannot and must not shirk. It is not unnatural that in the minds of many there are questions: "Will non-alignment continue to be practised? What are likely to be China's manoeuvres in relation to India and how can they be countered? Can there be an acceptable solution to the problem of Kashmir and an end to the continuing tension with Pakistan? Can India steer clear of foreign pressures, especially from obvious Anglo-American quarters? With Nehru gone, will the work of that remarkable quartette, Nehru, Nasser, Khrushchov and Tito, continue to be sustained? Will India's new leadership have vision and strength enough to build firmly on foundations that, occasional fumbling notwithstanding, Nehru had so conspicuously laid?" These and other questions will go on being asked—complicated questions which in a peculiarly complex period, when sense and near-insanity co-exist precariously in the international field, when the perspectives of freedom have infinitely widened and yet fulfilment is often threatened by continuing signs of perversity and pig-headedness in the relations between nations, are not very easily and precisely answerable. Jawaharlal gave his life so that India might make her home, happy and serene, in the midst of restless world. This country will be wise to hitch her wagon to that star.

As these lines are written, a firm answer is being given to those who vociferously charged that India's policy of non-alignment had brought her no tangible dividends and that, confronted with the unpredictable and continuing threat that China's attitudes represented, this country should seek the umbrella of protection offered by a Power like the United States and be thereby done with her worries. When the Chinese threat loomed heavy over India even Nehru had some weak moments, as when he agreed to Anglo-U.S. air exercises over India, even accepted tentatively a radio network deal and hesitated to give vent to the horror he

must have felt at the cruising of the Indian Ocean area by the U.S. Seventh Fleet with nuclear equipment more than sufficient for blowing up our part of the world. His successors, infinitely more timorous and conspicuously unendowed with his vision, often flounder in ways that might be dangerous. Even so, as the USSR and the USA, in typically different ways, agree to strengthen the defence potential which India needs for security, the fair harvest of non-alignment is seen to be garnered. And the agenda of the conference of non-aligned nations, to be attended by more than fifty countries, is drawn fully in the spirit of the stance that Nehru had popularised in his country and the world.

Let it be remembered with pride that when India became free, in the most difficult context of things, with the sorrows of partition piling up, the problems of under-development staring cruelly in the face and the winds of cold war threatening to freeze her spirit into subordination, Nehru, almost necessarily circumspect, never yielded to the angling for India's allegiance which the world's most powerful country, the United States, skilfully practised, in spite of a Dulles coming up for a while with a "black and white, good and evil argument" which proved fundamentally futile. It was a great job that Nehru did by and large, keeping India "uncommitted", harping on non-alignment as an ethical and political necessity, moderating conflicts that threatened to end fatally to civilization in full-scale war, and pressing for the expansion of the area of political freedom and the endeavour for peace. Abroad, as well as at home, he was described as being "close to international communism"; it was said that "towards the communists he has an instinctive indulgence that has weakened the defences of democracy", whatever that might mean.<sup>28</sup> To communists and their opposite numbers, Jawaharlal would often say that "life was no string of denunciations" which made

<sup>28</sup> See articles by A. D. Gorwala and Asoka Mehta in "A Study of Nehru", *op. cit.*, Pp. 257, 295.



it "unbalanced". With an affinity to Buddhist thought which, of course, he never worked out, he sought to follow, in a world of conflict, "the middle way". There were in it pitfalls, sometimes of his own making, for the going was never easy, but unlike the gloomy alleys of alignment, it was a path that glowed with a light that will not easily fade.

## CHAPTER XII

### "THIS WAS A MAN"

What Shakespeare wrote of a very different type of man seems to apply perfectly as one thinks of Jawaharlal Nehru:

His life was gentle, and the elements  
‘ So mix’d in him that Nature might stand up  
And say to all the world ‘This was a man!’

It was, for India, a happy turn of fate that he was drawn into the vortex of active work in the cause of his people, and under the spell of a rare soul like Gandhi, for it is quite likely that otherwise, with his kind of gift and sensitivity, he might have gone his lonely way, with "some unborn protest, some unformed idea", inconsequentially to society and in virtual oblivion. As a young man he had seen in the India of that time that if he followed the usual ways of life that were open to his kind he would have to "submit to a faith that had become a cant of pious words; a collective will that cloaked only collective impotence; a conscience which expended itself in a stickling for empty forms; a reason that was a clatter of commonplaces; and a kind of work that was meaningless busy-work."<sup>1</sup> If in 1919-20 and subsequently things did not happen in India the way they did and if, Gandhi with his earthiness and magic did not appear on the scene, Jawaharlal perhaps might have tried, at the price of isolation, to find some way of meeting existential problems and in all probability failed in the effort. He was luckier, however, for things turned out differently, and looking back, he could write: "My generation has been a troubled one in India and the world ... In spite of all the mistakes that we have made, we have saved ourselves from

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Erik H. Erikson, *op. cit.*, Pp. 94 ff, 129-30.



triviality and an inner shame and cowardice."<sup>2</sup> His life, as we look back on it, is no mere success story, but it is free, by and large, of what was petty and grasping, and its beauties shine out like stars in the night.

For four decades and more, this gentle colossus strode our Indian world and his place among the great figures of our time is secure. But his uniqueness lay in the unobtrusive opulence of endowment which gave him, in the thick of politics and in the face even of frustrations, a peculiar refinement and grace of spirit. It was not only that he was "a man without malice and without fear"<sup>3</sup> but that he carried an ache in his mind and heart, an ache which betokened his kinship with the whole wide world. It was this, more than any particular tangible quality, which marked him out from the world's politicians. Some of the latter have made a more powerful impact on contemporary history. They have been big men, no doubt, in bulk if not always in essence, but perhaps one should hesitate to call them great. They have had stature, but unlike Jawaharlal, hardly the soul commensurate with it. They scarcely knew what was the very breath of Jawaharlal's being—an innate charity in the sense in which St. Paul expounded it to the Corinthians, and something of the compassion which the Buddha preached. Jawaharlal was no maker of history, for he had neither the strength nor the crudity that was needed, but in his own way he was peerless. There is thus a depth of meaning in the tribute paid to his memory by one of India's acutest thinkers, C. Rajagopalachari: "... a beloved friend is gone, the most civilized person among us all. Not many among us are civilized yet."<sup>4</sup>

Jawaharlal's smile, the red rose on his button-hole, the easy enchantment of his manner, whether with children or with adults, his love for the sights and sounds of Nature, attested an aesthetic bent of mind. Often in moods of in-

<sup>2</sup> "The Discovery of India", P. 691.

<sup>3</sup> This appears to have been said by Winston Churchill, sworn enemy of Indian independence; see Brecher, *op. cit.*, P. 229.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in "Andhra Pradesh", July 1964 (Nehru Number), P. 24.

tropection which, even when overwhelmed with continuous work he could never entirely shed, he felt the injustice, the unhappiness and the brutality of the world darkening everything about him and saw no way out, but there was in him also something of the pagan who knew the rich and tolerant variety of life and gloried in it—for life had not only “swamps and marshes and muddy places” but also “the great sea and the mountains, and snow and glaciers, and wonderful starlit nights, and the love of family and friends and the comradeship of workers in a common cause, and music and books, and the empire of ideas.”<sup>5</sup> It was his sense of this beauty which was revolted as he heard life itself, as it were, “wail for the world’s wrong”. And when, with Gandhi as his guide, he had seen at close quarters how his people had to live, he knew he was to be for ever with those “to whom the misery of the world is misery and will not let them rest.” He is no mere politician who comes to politics on account of the compulsion of his whole being and not for the usual trivialities. And Jawaharlal, though in many ways very much a politician, had a vital part of himself utterly untainted by the peculiar squalor of political life.

“I have been a dabbler in many things”, he once wrote ; “I began with science at college and then took to the law, and after developing various other interests in life, finally adopted the popular and widely practised profession of gaol-going in India.” No “dabbler”, however, could reach anything like the illustrious position he achieved. He was for long the paladin of Indian patriotism, impulsive and daring, generous and loyal even to a fault, full of sense and sensibility in relation to the affairs of a fast changing world—a man who came to be hailed as a leader of awakening Asia and a symbol of the newly emerging international set-up. In his composition there were many contradictory elements; like all significant men, he was “large” and contained “multi-

<sup>5</sup> “Glimpses of World History”, Vol. II, Pp. 746, 1503.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Pp. 1498-99.





Kennedy

New Delhi

14. 9. 1950

My dear Sir,

Your letter of the 12th Sept.

What you have written might well represent in some degree or other, the opinioned thinking of many persons, in India and other countries. In spite of all the great achievements of our life, we live in a period of doubt and bewilderment, with no security of the future. Some feel this more than others. You, being sensitive, suffer more.

Anyway, I am grateful to you for having written to me frankly about the turmoil in your mind - It does some good to get this out and to discuss it, though it hardly does any good to many persons.

With whom one can talk about these matters.

I have long wanted to have Kennedy talks with you but in the rich demands that life is not found. Still we must find some time for this.

I am just off to Bangalore - On my return I'll be in Patiala. And then possibly to New Delhi for the V. D. Seminar.

Love  
Yours truly  
Franklin D. Roosevelt

## PERSONAL

NEW DELHI  
14-9-60.

MY DEAR HIREN,

Your letter of the 12th Sept.

What you have written might well represent in some degree or other, the agonised thinking of many persons, in India and other countries. In spite of all the great achievements of our age, we live in a period of doubt and bewilderment, with no surty of the future. Some feel this more than others. You, being sensitive, suffer more.

Anyway, I am grateful to you for having written to me frankly about the turmoil in your mind—it does some good to get this out and to discuss it, though unfortunately there are not too many persons with whom one can talk about these matters.

I have long wanted to have leisurely talks with you but in the rush of events that leisure is not found. Still we must find some time for this.

I am just off to Bangalore—on my return I go to Pakistan. And then possibly to New York for the U. N. General Assembly.

Love.

Yours affectionately,  
Sd. /- JAWAHARLAL NEHRU.



tudes". The story goes that once, in Allahabad, a professor-friend offered to arrange for him a meeting of a few "groups" of keen students who were "trying to think", and Jawaharlal answered, "Ah yes, but what about the groups inside me?" He knew "India was in my blood" and also that he did not "quite belong".<sup>7</sup> "An aristocrat in love with the masses, a nationalist who represents the culture of the foreigner, an intellectual caught up in the maelstrom of an emotional upheaval—the very paradox of his personality has surrounded it with a halo".<sup>8</sup> This contrariness, however, did not affect the integrity of his character, built not in the monistic manner of most revolutionaries, but with a tendency towards eclecticism, a tolerance of diversity and a hesitation to make up his mind over many things—perhaps all Indian characteristics, for didn't our ancient seers, seeking definition, often exclaim: "Not this, not this"? A trite criticism of him was that he was cast unhappily in the role of a modern Hamlet, always on the horns of a dilemma that he could not boldly overcome. Somewhat petulant critics have called Jawaharlal a minor poet who had missed his vocation.<sup>9</sup> None could miss the poetry even in his vacillations and weaknesses—chances of success could not lure him into casting himself in moulds which made him ill at ease. It was this element of poetry in his character and his ways that won him, insensibly, more abounding love from his countrymen than has been the portion of almost anyone else in Indian history. It made a moody, in some respects finicky and a too often hesitantly man who found much in his country's life to re-<sup>10</sup>ceive him, yet cleave to his people with a love which passed <sup>11</sup>understanding. There was not the remotest hint of <sup>12</sup>apose when, nearly ten years before his death, he drew up <sup>13</sup>his will and testament (made known only when he died), <sup>14</sup>requesting "a handful of my ashes" to be thrown <sup>15</sup>into the Ganga, "the river of India", and the rest to

<sup>7</sup> Moraes, *op. cit.*, Pp. 43, 139.

<sup>8</sup> K. R. Kripalani, "Gandhi, Tagore and Nehru", P. 73, quoted in Brecher, *op. cit.*, P. 230.

<sup>9</sup> This was said of him once in the Indian Parliament during 1952-53.

be scattered over the fields, where India's peasants toil, "to become an indistinguishable part" of our immemorial country.<sup>10</sup>

Paul Valéry, the French poet, argued in some of his pugnacious moods that any continuous statement was bound to be false, since man is an organic, perpetually changing creature whose moments of consciousness are disparate and probably even irreconcilable. This is, of course, an extreme formulation, at bottom unhelpful to thought and to the real processes of life, which only a hyper-sensitive and almost necessarily fretful artist could make. In Jawaharlal also there was a poet waking occasionally to register his peculiar disquiet about things and a kind of charming incertitude. "We are all, I suppose", he once wrote, "rather lonely persons, sometimes doubting what we ourselves say or do."<sup>11</sup> This trait in his make-up, like the lightning quality of his responses and the co-existence of impulsiveness and impatience with deliberation and even caution, has led to an idea that he was something of "a torn being", which T. S. Eliot spoke of in his poems.<sup>12</sup> As a sensitive young man drawn into the hurly-burly of public life, he may have passed through that phase, but it must have been short-lived, and in his own way he soon achieved a remarkable integration. He could never refer to India's masses in words such as Eliot wrote:

On Margate sands  
I connect nothing with nothing,  
The broken finger-nails of dirty people,  
My people, humble people, who expect nothing!

Such moods, indeed, could never be Jawaharlal's. Quite early in his political life, he established a genuine *rapprochement* with simple folk whom he would meet *en masse*, rather than

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<sup>10</sup> The text of this document deserves greatly to be treasured for the light it throws on Jawaharlal's thinking and the spell that India casts on her children.

<sup>11</sup> Letter to Hiren Mukerjee, dated New Delhi, June 9, 1957.

<sup>12</sup> Moraes, *op. cit.*, P. 43.



with his quite often pompous colleagues. "I feel I have a desire to be frank with them because they are frank with me", he wrote; "I have a sense of communion with them, although I am very different from them."<sup>13</sup> Even as prime minister, working a seventeen-hour day, he would be talking almost every morning "to a few hundred people", generally unsophisticated men and women who had trudged miles to be in his presence.<sup>14</sup> And he would not talk to them from a pedestal, but simply, as man to man, on problems of their daily existence. This was furthest removed from demagogy in inverted form, for demagogy, fundamentally, is deceitful and Jawaharlal was incapable of it. It was his way of giving expression to the "discovery" that he had made, and was continually making, of our India: "She is a myth and an idea, a dream and a vision, and yet very real and present and pervasive. There are terrifying glimpses of dark corridors which seem to lead back to primeval night, but also there is the fulness and worth of the day about her. Shameful and repellent she is occasionally, perverse and obstinate, sometimes even a little hysteric, this lady with a past. But she is very lovable, and none of her children can forget her wherever they go or whatever strange fate befalls them. For she is part of them in her greatness as well as her failings, and they are mirrored in those deep eyes of hers that have seen so much of life's passion and joy and folly, and looked down into wisdom's well."<sup>15</sup> India's "old witchery" held his heart and with the hoops of hard-earned love he had clasped himself to all her children who might and did sometimes evoke his disgust but never the hint even of disdain. At the same time he knew and he constantly reminded his people that while a people must "have a certain depth and certain roots somewhere", "one cannot live in roots alone"—these roots must "come out in the sun and the free air" to give sustenance, to have "a branching out and a flowering."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> "India's Spokesman", *op. cit.*, P. 8.

<sup>14</sup> R. K. Karanjia, "The Mind of Nehru" (London, 1960), Pp. 63-4.

<sup>15</sup> "India's Spokesman", *op. cit.* (Speech, April 9, 1950), P. 194.

<sup>16</sup> "India's Spokesman", *op. cit.* (Speech, April 9, 1950), P. 194.



Such indeed, was the "balance" he always wanted India to achieve in the setting of modern life.

And so Jawaharlal, in his work for India and for the world, yearned to revive the passion for truth and beauty and freedom which gives meaning to life and releases the spirit of adventure, the quest, which never ends, for fulfilment. "Old as we are," he told his people, "with memory stretching back to the early dawn of human history and endeavour, we have to grow young again in tune with our present time, with the irrepressible spirit and joy of youth in the present and its faith in the future." It was imperative, he used to reiterate, that we had to come to grips with "the present, this life, this world, this nature which surrounds us in its infinite variety." In love with our storied past, he was the furthest removed from a revivalist. When he found some Hindus raising the slogan of "Back to the Vedas!" or Muslims dreaming of an Islamic theocracy he would warn them: "Idle fancies, for there is no going back to the past; there is no turning back even if this was thought desirable. There is only one-way traffic in Time. . . ."<sup>17</sup> Thus it was that he stressed, as no man in India has done in his day, science as the world's new evangel, and at the same time linked it gracefully with the humanities. "We must not combine spirituality and culture with privilege on the one hand and poverty on the other," he told Delhi University students some six years ago, discussing the question of standards and values. "It has become inevitable for us," he said, "to fit in with the modern world of science and technology, and it will be dangerous for us to imagine that we can live apart from it. It will be equally dangerous for us to think that we should accept technology without those basic values which are of the essence of civilized men." Here are questions and answers that touch the roots of our being and the springs of thought and action. Jawaharlal did not profess to say the last word, nor should

<sup>17</sup> Quotations in "The India I Love", Gandhi Marg, July 1964.



one in reason expect him to do so. He posed similar other questions and could not quite stay for the answers: "We inherit this whole past of India with its glory and its failures. We are part of it; we cannot and must not deny it. But can we live in that past? We have to live in the present and mould the future."<sup>18</sup> Latterly, he used often to commend Vinoba Bhave's dictum about science and spirituality being the twin panacea of the world's ills. He knew, however, that there could not, and there need not even be,<sup>19</sup> a final solution of all our conflicts—conflicts of the body and of the mind—a last frozen synthesis which would spell the end of life as man has known and loved it. And he found solace in the wisdom and beauty that man has shored even against the ruin of many of his hopes and beliefs and aspirations.

It appears, from an interesting recent report, that Rabindranath Tagore once remarked, in conversation, that modern India, proud of her past but somewhat weighed down by its immensity, a little unsure about herself yet aware that she could not do without an acceptance of the spirit of science, was more truly represented by Jawaharlal than by Gandhi. For the latter the poet had the highest esteem, and he thought Gandhi did represent the soul of India, but in the sense of its being timeless, that is, not limited by the conditions set by the past or the present, which he had tried to transcend by an ascetic devotion to Truth and a passion for service to fellow beings. This talk was conveyed, one learns, after Tagore's death to Gandhi who "half in jest and half in earnest" said that Tagore had been "wholly wrong", for Gandhi could live happily and usefully in an Indian village while Jawaharlal, something of an "Englishman", would find his time and talents wasted in such surroundings since he would feel "bogged down by the smallness of the task

<sup>18</sup> Delhi University, 36th Convocation Address, December 8, 1958.

<sup>19</sup> His view that "the future belongs to science and to those who make friends with science" is the keynote of a special number of "Science Reporter" (Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, New Delhi), July-August, 1964.



immediately on hand." It is true that Jawaharlal, unlike Gandhi, was an intellectual who needed a broad world-view in order to be able to see "his immediate practical involvement in its proper perspective." He had an impatience with the inertia and the semi-contented vacuity which he often saw around him in India. Gandhi had a more capacious tolerance, perhaps thought mediocrity and even mindlessness a virtue, and had, as Gokhale once observed, the capacity of "turning heroes out of clay"—a quality which Jawaharlal never possessed or even worried about. There is no doubt that Gandhi achieved, in difficult conditions, a peculiar identification with his own people, but in the manner of the saint rather than the revolutionary, concerned more with the spiritual than with the secular virtues. Jawaharlal, on his part, did achieve substantial identification with the people—he would not have been loved so deeply and almost instinctively otherwise—but it was an identification on the mental level, not "on the level of daily living."<sup>20</sup> Even so the people came to think of him also as having the "healing touch" that Gandhi possessed. Perhaps like a sculptor who is necessarily somewhat aloof, and yet sees in stone the outlines of the image he seeks to carve, Jawaharlal saw in the people their unfolding potentialities which he valued greatly. Thus in fact, while facing an enormous concourse he spoke to every man—it was always a dialogue, as someone once said, never a harangue. For in spite of a certain detachment he gave to his people, without reference to caste or class or colour or creed, not only his heart but his hand and every other faculty of service. To the world he offered his understanding and his friendship, but to India he gave his all.

He did it without the sheer certitude of a saint; it was not so much an ethical imperative as an entirely human response. Thus, unlike Gandhi who in crucial matters would justify himself only to himself, Jawaharlal would seek justification not only of himself to himself but to all others. He

<sup>20</sup> Cf. N. K. Bose in "Economic Weekly", *op. cit.*, P. 1189.



had the truly democratic instinct of being answerable for whatever his stand or his policy involved. He wrote, not only because of the writer's itch, and he spoke incessantly, because he had many things to propound and explain and get across to the people. Once referring to the stupendous refugee problem and the enormities that had followed in the wake of Partition, he said in the (Provisional) Parliament: "In fact, I have often wondered why the people of India put up with people like me who are connected with the governing of India after all that has happened during the last few months. I am not quite sure that if I had not been in the government I would put up with my government." A few years later, when a member of Parliament reminded him of his earlier resolve to put an end to all imports of food by April 1952, he answered frankly: "I regret that my words have been falsified and I feel thoroughly ashamed that what was almost a pledge to the country has been broken."<sup>21</sup> Indeed, almost every speech of his was an elaboration, because he did have things to explain and he would explain them—patiently, though his mental processes were quick and he was not a patient person. "We have to hurry", he wrote nearly twenty years ago, "for the time at our disposal is limited and the pace of the world grows even swifter."<sup>22</sup> Towards the end of his life he would tell his colleagues of the need for "hurry", for there was little time to lose. He could not, however, overcome the factors which forced a drastic lessening of the pace that was wanted. Gentle, hardly ever stern, and far too forgiving, he failed his obligations to history in this regard. Long ago he had spoken of "equal economic justice and opportunity for all", adding the warning that "everything that comes in the way will have to be removed gently if possible and forcibly if necessary."<sup>23</sup> He did not ever give up this understanding, but his achievement fell far short of it.

<sup>21</sup> Quotations as in "India's Spokesman", *op. cit.*

<sup>22</sup> "The Discovery of India", Epilogue, P. 581.

<sup>23</sup> "An Autobiography", P. 552.

In November 1937, there appeared in the Calcutta monthly "Modern Review" an article by Jawaharlal under the pseudonym of Chanakya, where in somewhat puckish vein he analysed himself. "Jawaharlal cannot become a fascist", he wrote, "and yet he has all the makings of a dictator in him—vast popularity, a strong will directed to a well-defined purpose, energy, pride, organizational capacity, ability, hardness, and with all his love of the crowd, an intolerance of others and a certain contempt for the weak and the inefficient". Again, "he calls himself a democrat and a socialist, and no doubt he does so in earnestness, but every psychologist knows that the mind is ultimately slave to the heart and that logic can always be made to fit in with the desires and irrepressible urges of man. A little twist and Jawaharlal might turn a dictator sweeping aside the paraphernalia of a slow-moving democracy."<sup>24</sup> Perhaps knowledge is dangerous, the first forbidden fruit, and knowing oneself, after a certain limit, paralyses action. Jawaharlal knew himself so well that he checked "his overmastering desire to get things done, to sweep away what he dislikes and build anew" and reconciled himself to the "slow processes of democracy" which he thought he could not "brook for long". He guarded himself against that "little twist" and adhered to the rails of democracy. As dictator he would have been, in all probability, a flop; he was not single-minded enough, and was incapable of being ruthless and also a trifle mad. It was a good job that he did not try that unsavoury line, but it was a pity too that he could do little about "the slow processes of democracy". All his talk about the changes in approach proved largely futile. But for him, India would have felt much less the winds of change that have been blowing over the world; he made us aware of them and also more receptive. Yet he failed his people in so far as he could not adequately execute the great mandate he had from them because he just could not be relentless enough. He was our

<sup>24</sup> Quotations in "The Working Journalist", May 1964.



beautiful but ineffectual angel, beating his luminous wings largely in vain.

This seems to be the real significance of what Rabindranath Tagore once said about Jawaharlal, namely, that he was "greater than his deeds and truer than his surroundings."<sup>25</sup> If a catalogue is made, mechanically, of the many different items of his work, it adds up to what is by no means the measure of the man. In pre-independence days, he raised high hopes so often, but they were usually belied or at any rate unfulfilled. "I am quite of your opinion", wrote Gandhi to Jawaharlal as early as April 1928, "that some day we shall have to start a movement without the rich people and without the vocal educated class. But that time is not yet."<sup>26</sup> Such a movement, unfortunately, neither Gandhi, who might be excused, nor Jawaharlal, who could not claim exoneration on purely Gandhian grounds, could ever bring themselves to start, not even in 1945-46 when there was a splendid opportunity, indeed, of uniting Hindus and Muslims "at the barricades", and perhaps with no more than a slight risk to pre-suppositions about non-violence and about ends and means, there could have been a magnificent upsurge. It is pertinent also to remember that in 1938-39 a little less of the thralldom that Jawaharlal bore in relation to Gandhi might conceivably have changed the picture of things in Indian politics, if the Left, with Nehru and Bose working together, had a fighting chance of proving, if it could, its worth. On no account, again, can Jawaharlal escape his responsibility for failure to prevent communalism developing so that the Muslim demand for partition came to be thought inexorable, while a clearer understanding and a readiness for the sort of popular action which was an antidote to communalism could have achieved happier results. Except for a short phase in 1942, the Congress struggle shied away from the organization of mass militancy, and its line of least resistance led to a blind alley where Britain, posing as benevolent arbiter, gave us a

<sup>25</sup> "A Study of Nehru", *op. cit.*, P. 144.

<sup>26</sup> Tendulkar, "Mahatma", Vol. VIII, Pp. 351-52.

parting kick which sundered our country so grievously that we have still to be licking our wounds. There is no questioning the achievements of independent India, but there is another side to the shield. In the structure of whatever integration we have won there are chinks. Our secularism is frequently suspect and is threatened by forces that are Britain's legacy and also the fruit of our own defaults; the glow of freedom remains, in spite of Nehru's charming adjuration, still unlit in the hearts of our sorely tried people. And we creep uncertainly, instead of marching steadily, in the direction of socialism, and Jawaharlal's doubts and diffidences seem to be a reminder of what was said in the Bible long ago: "If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare themselves to the battle?" He gave his people no real call, he neglected institutional arrangements and he could never make up his mind about the stern steps that were necessary if this old country was to be built anew. Years ago, at the Faizpur Congress, he had spoken unforgettable words: "I have seen again the throbbing agony of India's masses, the call of their eyes for relief from the terrible burdens they carry. That is our problem; all others are secondary. . . ."<sup>27</sup> Jawaharlal's people had given him a giant's strength, but even for the fulfilment of his own cherished dreams he could not use it, when it was necessary, like a giant.

In January 1940, Subhas Chandra Bose is reported to have said in a casual talk: "Jawaharlal may make a good leader or Prime Minister in normal times, but in a crisis he will fail."<sup>28</sup> This is not entirely an accurate assessment; there could be no crisis more crucial than what followed the partition, when communal frenzy threatened to overwhelm even the nation's capital, but in many ways it was Jawaharlal's "finest hour". There is much truth in what he is said to have said about himself, namely, that he often lost his temper

<sup>27</sup> "Nehru on Socialism", P. 92.

<sup>28</sup> H. V. Kamath in "Illustrated Weekly of India," August 16, 1959, P. 32.



but never his nerve. And when in October-November 1962, China mounted the attack on India's Himalayan outposts, Jawaharlal's determination to defend the country stood out as much as the dignity with which he behaved. It was not easy in the temper of those days to stress, as he did in Parliament and outside, a kind of shining refusal to turn chauvinist even as India was resolute in the defence of her sovereignty and integrity. It was no simple task, either, to steer his course in that critical period so that the virtues of his policy of non-alignment, which had come suddenly to be condemned, crudely and with all the gusto that reaction could muster, as so much lumber to be thrown into the scrapheap, were found before long to sparkle again. Even so, there were in India, with its complex back-log of history which cannot be easily cleared, such multitudinous problems that only the temper and tone of revolution could tackle them. With a plentiful dower of refinement, however, Jawaharlal found himself unable, in spite of his desire, to grapple successfully with the crudities and the cupidity and crime which had come to overlay the life of our country. "Continuously existing at several, very often anti-podal plans", able to inspire but not to "provide guidance, precisely and in detail, to provide the sense of direction", he "could never succeed in negotiating the incline from abstraction to realities"—"a fatal deficiency for a nation-builder."<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps left to himself, Nehru would have shaped differently, but of course it is impossible to conceive of a great public figure to be left to himself, and one can only regret that history did not provide him with a more perceptive, capable and discerning company. He had necessarily to run a large and heterogeneous party and came to terms with elements that, in spite of a certain contiguity, had little real kinship with him. Also it often happened that at crucial times he let his mind, a very fine mind indeed, be made up for him by other forces with whom, ideally speaking, he

<sup>29</sup> Cf. A. M.'s article in "Economic Weekly", *op. cit.*, Pp. 1195-97.



should have broken but never did. This was the result of the fixation which he had in regard to the Congress, a fixation which was the result both of deep sentimental attachment and cool political calculation. From time to time he would be reminded of what he could perhaps accomplish if he shed his merely Congress shell and acted really and truly as the nation's leader. On this point, as noted before, he once wrote: "Does that not ultimately mean starting a new party and be limited by that? We have had many great men in the past who, rebelling against the caste system or something else ended merely by starting a new 'sampradaya'. To the multitude of our gods and goddesses and of our sects, they added a few more."<sup>30</sup> This is an argument which, in the given conditions of his time, cannot be brushed away, but it does appear that he could not think out, and in alliance with favourable elements, achieve in practice the methodology that was needed to move our immense country out of the inertia of age into the dynamic future of which he spoke so often. More than any other man of his stature in India, he was not only appalled by poverty but also revolted by it as something inconsistent with the self-respect and dignity of man. None was more keen on resolving what he called India's "split personality" and the glaring contradiction between out-of-date social beliefs and practices and modern scientific knowledge. With the utmost respect for the enduring values inherited from the past, he wanted India to be modern, that is to say, to be abreast of developments in knowledge and to fashion society on the basis of that knowledge. Yet this man who could have been a real maker of history and was engaged till the last of his days in ceaseless labour, virtually shrank from the basic jobs that were incumbent on him but which, with a peculiar fastidiousness, he could not undertake effectively. It has, of course, to be stressed that this was by no means just one great man's default, but the result of the failure,

<sup>30</sup> Letter to Hiren Mukerjee, June 9, 1957.



in the objective conditions of India's life, of other more powerful forces which could either decisively influence the leadership, in which Nehru had a large place, or perhaps gradually replace it.

Jawaharlal Nehru cannot be judged, however, by reference only to what was achieved during his tenure of power, the economic advance of the country and the place of India in the comity of nations. He is entitled to be judged by history in the light of what he did and sought further to do "to free the minds of men and set them in movement, to release his people from the grip of a parochial nationalism and choking allegiances that diminished man."<sup>81</sup> He made many mistakes, no doubt, but they were due, in general, to the defects of his qualities. In pre-independence days, when fighting the fissiparous forces that, with the blessings of imperialism, brought about the Partition of India, he was not realist enough to see what he did not *wish* to see in the communal picture. However, even as he chided the then Muslim League for its misguided petulance and asked it to "line up" with the Congress in the struggle for freedom, his generosity and patent sincerity was never in doubt. In the post-independence period he placed before his people the vision, the ideal and the perspectives of socialism, but he was not realist enough to call sternly for the social discipline and even austerity which an underdeveloped country had necessarily to practise on a wide and somewhat egalitarian basis if the requisite economic advance was to be achieved without unconscionable delay. Too often the native hue of his resolution was sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, and he thought also in flashes that came to him naturally and without the cool and collected concentration which could have been a corrective to the somewhat loose and tenuous poetic quality of his conclusions. He had a horror of orthodoxy of every

<sup>81</sup> Editorial article in "Economic Weekly", *op. cit.* Thus, it was with Tagore he strongly criticised Gandhi for explaining the Bihar earthquake (1934) as punishment for sin, and much later, almost alone, he castigated performance of religious rites for appeasing angry planets.



sort and the doctrinal dogmatism which, as a factor in social evolution, has a great deal to answer for, but often a certain amorphousness and lack of positivity, which could be pretty but was none the less banal, crept in to his thought and inhibited action. Even so, whether in the right or in error, there was in him a luminous quality, for in whatever was evil he never would acquiesce, and to the end he was the non-conformist, determined to find the answer to the problems of his India, gifted with vision that is life-giving and a passionate concern for its fulfilment, moving forward, even in his most passive moments, on account of his own dynamic commitment to ever widening perspectives. "I am sorry in a way I will not be there to see and share", he once said, "the new dimension to the human mind" introduced by the stupendous recent advances in science and technology.<sup>22</sup> And yet, without self-pity or false pride, he spoke to students of Allahabad University: "I may have only a few years to live and the only ambition I have is that to the end of my days I shall work my hardest and then when I have done my job there is no need to bother about me further."<sup>23</sup>

To the very end he laboured, taking on burdens that would have broken the back of most other people. And he worried, particularly as he felt he might not have much longer to live, that he had "promises to keep" to his people and to posterity, and there were miles and miles to go before he could call it a day. No less than his critics he was conscious of vast tasks still undone, but he knew no way, consistently with his convictions and his view of men and things, along which he could go ahead faster and without damage to the values that he cherished. Here, indeed, lay his historic failure—the failure to achieve change for fear of the price that might have had to be paid and in deep concern for the right means so that the future was not to be garish and crude. More than most people in positions of

<sup>22</sup> Karanjia, *op. cit.*, Pp. 102-03.

<sup>23</sup> "India's Spokesman", *op. cit.*, P. 20.



power, he gave thought always to the paramount problem of our age, that of the transition to the new society. He knew that in class society one finds release of the spirit in falling back into worlds of one's own, in art and in the illumination of knowledge and of sensitive perception, but that when society is purged of the dross of ages, one wakes, as it were, into a common world of air and light, a world which is the patented preserve of no élite but belongs to all. He knew also that the transition was difficult and prolonged and painful and yet had to be made, for the very meaning of history lay in such human, and often necessarily fallible, endeavour. He knew he had great authority, which he could not run away from nor could lay aside like a wad of notes, and this authority needed to be wielded for helping, in India and abroad, the advance of man towards a world awake. Here, again, his knowledge and his sensitive perception proved a drag, for he was timorous of the zigzags in the road to revolution, the chasms that from time to time gaped along the way, and the cost involved in making the toilsome journey. It may be that history will judge him harshly, but for his own people who have known something of his mind and heart the task of judgment is not so simple. If he shrank from jobs set him relentlessly by history, he did it not by reason of guile and petty calculation but by reason of the love he bore mankind.

There is a remarkable letter, dated November 6, 1937, which Amrita Sher Gil, whose death at a young age was a great loss to India and to the world of painting, wrote to Jawaharlal. Thanking him for a copy of his autobiography, she wrote: "As a rule, I dislike biographies or autobiographies. They ring false pomposity or exhibitionism. But I think I will like yours. You are able to discard your halo occasionally. You are capable of saying 'When I saw the sea for the first time' when others would say 'When the sea saw me for the first time'!" Then she added: "I should like to have known you better. I am always attracted to people who are integral enough to be inconsistent without

discrepancy and who don't trail viscous threads of regret behind them.

"I don't think that it is on the threshold of life that one feels chaotic, it is when one has crossed the threshold that one discovers that things which looked simple and feelings that felt simple are infinitely tortuous and complex. That it is only in inconsistency that there is any consistency.

"But of course you have an orderly mind.

"I don't think you were interested in my painting really. You looked at my pictures without seeing them."

"You are not hard. You have got a mellow face. I like your face, it is sensitive, sensual and detached at the same time. . . ."<sup>84</sup>

Here is an eloquent little etching, which could come only from the hands of a consummate artist. It stands by itself, incapable of being improved upon, and an index to the fascinating mountains in Jawaharlal's mind. Can man that is born of woman ever look straight into his soul? Jawaharlal at least tried sometimes, but he could not always, and was driven, as humanity has been so often, to make shifts that could never entirely satisfy.

Once travelling in a plane in view of our great Himalayan peaks he looked out in childlike glee, and when someone told him he liked best the graceful outlines of Kanchanjanga; Jawaharlal quickly retorted that he did not, for he preferred Everest in its austerity. With the years he had attained a certain quietude which was to be the foundation of his strength when awesome responsibilities had devolved upon him. Along with it was a simple joy of living which lit up everything around him, for example when he was with children. For them, he once said, he always had time and not for adults. And the child in him would well up in children's company, suddenly and in

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<sup>84</sup> Quoted from "A Bunch of Old Letters" in "Andhra Pradesh", July 1964. Pp. 88-89.



unalloyed happiness, as when, after a performance before children by practised sword-players, he grabbed the weapon and merrily brandished it while everybody, with every worry banished for the moment, heartily rejoiced. It was a special feeling for life, again, which drew him towards animals, pining for the health of a sick baby panda, or showing friends how his tiger cub, asking to be fondled, purred in his arms. And his delicate courtesy, which never failed, was evidence of the respect in which, deep down in his heart, he held his fellow-men. No doubt he had a temper which, till a few years before his death, would often break out, but there was in it no malice ; it was like a sudden shower which cleansed, as it were, the atmosphere.

He often disclaimed a special aesthetic capacity, and even while giving his views would add modestly that he knew little about such things as painting and sculpture. Even so, it was a treat, for instance, to hear him explain to a stolidly dense audience of members of Parliament that the portrait of a national leader which he was unveiling (and at which his hearers chafed for they thought it was not a good enough likeness) was in fact a real work of art. He could not prevent many vulgar things being done—after all, he could not do everything that was needed—but it was to him alone that one could turn when in anguish over something that was vulgar and vandalistic, whether it was in the capital city or in far-off NagarjuniKonda. Strangely also, it was to him alone that one could turn in order to save a precious cricket pitch or an old wall with the moss of history gathered on to it or a noble avenue of trees.

He was, like everybody else in his position, not impervious to flattery, especially by plausible persons who could be somewhat articulate and smart in their ways. He had a weakness for people who did not wear our usual Indian mantle of sloppiness and a peculiar (and perhaps only apparent) insipidity of mind. He had "an acute dislike for illness and feebleness"—he said once, and not just in an irritable mood, "I do not sympathise with anybody's ill-

ness."<sup>25</sup> This was for no lack of feeling, but to stress his deep distaste for sloth of every description. Sometimes, however, again like most great men, he would lend his ears to be poisoned by carriers of tales; one thinks, in this connection, of the peculiar case of K. F. Nariman mentioned by Maulana Azad, or of the unfortunate, self-defeating attraction-cum-repulsion relationship which had grown between Subhas Chandra Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru. He was self-critical enough, but he had at bottom a fierce pride which indeed he needed to sustain himself, which was not the same thing as self-righteousness though sometimes very near to it. There was about him no super-humanity, nothing of the element which made Gandhi, in spite of his overflowing humanity, a denizen not so much of this planet as of another. Jawaharlal had his foibles, and it may be that he failed the bigger tests of history, but he won his people's trust and even more their affection in such measure as comes only to the best among our species.

Till as long as our sensibility endures, we cannot cease to cherish the memory of this gem of a man. Perhaps Mother India, as she received in her bosom the ashes of her child, wished she had given him even more of her love. For till the very end he carried a certain loneliness and the stubbornness of a somewhat wayward infant, yearning wordlessly for love's authority which for years, alas, none dared exert.

Of no man can more be said than it can be said of Jawaharlal Nehru: our world is a better place on account of his having lived in it. If a man can conquer death, as the *Aitareya Brahmana* tells us, he has done it. He belongs now to the ages, the famed aeons of Indian history. As he said of his master, when Gandhi died, "let us be worthy of him".

<sup>25</sup> "Speeches, 1953-57", P. 404 (Speech at Avadi Congress, 23 January 1955).